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ON THE

## International Sunday-School Lessons

For 1891.

EDITED BY

E. BENJAMIN ANDREWS, D.D., LL.D.,

PRESIDENT OF BROWN UNIVERSITY.

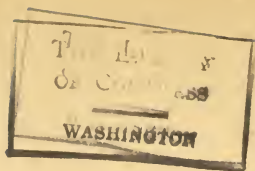


BOSTON:

SILVER, BURDETT & COMPANY,

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BV1560  
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## P R E F A C E.

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THE main character of this book will be obvious to every reader. It is not meant to supplant the usual lesson helps, but to supplement them. The expositions purposely avoid all specially fine exégesis, only presenting, so to speak, the gross anatomy of the passages. Good teachers are aware that this is quite as important as the more minute work, and much less likely to be well set forth in those discussions of the lessons which are accessible to all. By such a treatment we have succeeded in keeping up throughout a strong homiletical interest along with the exegetical. It is hoped that the volume will do something to stimulate among Baptists the habit of expository preaching. It certainly contains a number of sermons which may not inappropriately be taken as models of this. With the numerous amenities of a minister's lot goes this hardship, that he can rarely hear his brethren preach, particularly those resident at a distance from him. The opportunity of reading one

another's sermons furnishes us a pleasant though partial solace for this. Baptists are to be congratulated upon the evidence offered by these sermons that piety, soundness of mind, knowledge of Scripture, with reverence for and ability to expound the same, are so widely disseminated in the denomination. We have sought to make the matter edifying and helpful, not only to ministers and Sunday-school workers, but to general readers as well. The Editor confidently believes that the *résumé* herein given of Old Testament history between Solomon and the Captivity is to be matched in correctness and vivacity nowhere in the whole literature of the subject. The preachers for the second half cultivate a less recondite but equally important field, producing an abundant harvest of the richest spiritual food. May God accompany with his favor these efforts to make known his blessed Truth!

THE EDITOR.

BROWN UNIVERSITY,  
Nov. 11, 1890.



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THE FIRST QUARTER.



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## Lesson I. January 4.

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# THE KINGDOM DIVIDED.

*1 Kings xii: 1-17.*

BY REV. J. B. GOUGH PIDGE, D. D., PHILADELPHIA, PA.

THE primitive constitution of all the historic nations was democracy, which everywhere gave way in the course of time to monarchy. To neither part of this law does the history of Israel offer exception. The feeble kingship of the Homeric Greeks and of early Germany precisely resembles that of Saul. His authority, like that of Agamemnon or Clovis, was at first sharply limited, and the plots of anti-monarchists, using David as their rallying-centre, thwarted him at every turn. In those great rulers, David and Solomon, royalty completely triumphed, yet never so as quite to crush the democratic spirit, rebellion being all the time certain to occur the instant it had the slightest chance of success.

Accordingly, no sooner had Solomon been laid to rest in his royal sepulchre in the city of David than his splendid empire was split in twain, far the larger and fairer portion of it throwing off allegiance and setting up a separate kingdom. The leader in this was Jeroboam, son of Nebat, a young scion of the tribe of Ephraim. Like many a lad since, he had early gone to the capital to seek his fortune. His remarkable ability and industry attracting the king's notice, he was advanced to the position of superintendent over the work of fortification committed to his

tribe. Like his great ancestor, Joseph, he was now chief among his brethren ; but God had destined him for yet greater things. Ahijah the Shilonite met him as he walked alone in the field, and teaching, prophet-like, by object-lessons and startling similes, seized Jeroboam's garment and rent it into a dozen strips. Ten of these he gave back to the owner. Then to the astonished youth he divulged the meaning of this. As he had rent Jeroboam's robe, so would God rend Solomon's kingdom ; and as he had given into Jeroboam's hand ten fragments of the torn cloth, so would God give Jeroboam ten of the tribes of Israel to rule, leaving the house of Solomon but two.

The prophet declared that this was not to occur during Solomon's lifetime ; but the young man's ambition was so fired by the prospect of power that he could not wait the slow development of Providence, and sought to hasten the consummation himself. By some act of rebellion he incurred the king's hostility, and was compelled to flee into Egypt, where he remained till Solomon's death.

The leaders of the liberal party in Israel then summoned him home to head their campaign for relief from the burdens which Solomon's lavish expenditure had imposed upon the State. When, therefore, Solomon's son appeared at Shechem to receive the crown, "Jeroboam and all the congregation of Israel came, and spake unto Rehoboam, saying, Thy father made our yoke grievous: now therefore make thou the grievous service of thy father, and his heavy yoke which he put upon us, lighter, and we will serve thee. And he said unto them, Depart yet for three days, then come again to me. And the people departed."

It was a critical moment for Rehoboam, — the turning-point in his life. The people's complaints were just, and their bearing, though proud and independent, was conciliatory ; but it was very plain that they were in earnest.



Rehoboam would have been wise to give heed. But in those distant days, when constitutional liberty had not yet begun to be dreamed of, kings were not so used to such displays of spirit, or so sagacious in dealing with them, as they have since become. Even in our day they are none too wise.

The king was not without sage counsellors. Cabinet ministers who had grown gray in his father's service and imbibed his wisdom and his knowledge of statecraft, were all about him. To these, with a show of respect, he at first turns. He inquires, "How do ye advise that I may answer this people? And they spake unto him, saying, If thou wilt be a servant unto this people this day, and wilt serve them, and answer them, and speak good words to them, then they will be thy servants for ever."

Never was a king in a governmental crisis blessed with better counsel. It was the very quintessence of political wisdom. If he had but been guided by it, how different the after-fortunes of the chosen people! Had kings always acted on such principles, how much less bloody the trail of human history! To serve the people, the ruler's highest duty, — where, even yet, have men in high place learned this lesson? In the noble motto, *Ich dien*, — "I serve," on the Prince of Wales's coat-of-arms is indeed a recognition of the principle; but how few monarchs have worn such a motto graven on their hearts! Peter the Great, we know, served his people in the ship-yards of Holland and England; but his example is a singular one as well in the fact that he served at all as in the peculiar mode of his service. Kings usually require the most obsequious ministrations from their people, without a thought of any obligation in return. "Public office is a public trust" — a late utterance of an American Chief Magistrate — is the high-water mark of political conviction touching the duties of civil officers; but where in the annals

of modern States, except in rare instances, do we find any but the most imperfect embodiment of this sentiment in official conduct? For a ruler to be true to his trust, doing to the full what the people expect of him, — that is much; but Rehoboam's counsellors urged upon him a far higher ideal than this. They would have had him use his royal office as Saint Louis of France did, not in prescribed ways only, but in all possible ways, as a means of positive blessing to his subjects. Here is a conception of political duty upon which even these days of cumulative civic thought have witnessed no advance.

Alas! bad advisers too were about the young Rehoboam, — youths who had grown up with him, without experience or wisdom, and filled with the haughty notions of prerogative bred in the atmosphere of a despotic court. They were in character like the king himself, — swaggerers, headstrong, puffed up with the pride of power and place. Nought cared they for the people, or their complaints. What mattered it whether those were just or not? Subjects must learn not to find fault with their rulers. Let them know that the only result of their whining will be severer punishments and still heavier taxes. Then they will hold their tongues and submit. This, said they, is the answer to give: "My little finger shall be thicker than my father's loins. And now whereas my father did lade you with a heavy yoke, I will add to your yoke: my father hath chastised you with whips, but I will chastise you with scorpions" [scourges bristling with sharp points].

If the advice of the older counsellors had been the acme of political wisdom, surely this was the nadir of folly. In fact, it doubtless proceeded not so much from malignity as from sheer stupidity and utter ignorance of affairs. But the crazy counsel harmonized with Rehoboam's inclinations; so that when after the three days of deliberation the people

came for his reply, he "answered roughly, and forsook the old men's counsel that they gave him; and spake to them after the counsel of the young men."

Accustomed to see individuals cravenly submissive in their presence, despots with difficulty understand the stubborn spirit of large popular bodies, especially when fervently enlisted in a cause which they deem just. Blind to the Titanic forces that sway such a multitude, they are never prepared for firm opposition, but expect to see it crumble away at a word. How little did the lords and ladies whose luxurious follies and extravagances helped to bring on the French Revolution dream of the volcano over which they sported! Riding to court or chase on their splendid steeds, what feared they from the scowls which the crowd cast after them? What hearts in those merry groups ever sank with foreboding at thought of the settlement so soon to come between the high-born in their luxury and the peasants in their squalor and starvation! How impossible for those gay revellers to see in the dull, down-trodden people the courage to assert their rights against brave nobles and gentlemen accustomed to arms! It took the sack of the Bastile to awaken them; and it required grim Revolution to open the eyes of Rehoboam and the witless fops who had essayed to guide him.

Remonstrance had failed; nothing remained for the oppressed but to cast off utterly the yoke which galled them. "So when all Israel saw that the king hearkened not unto them, the people answered the king, saying, What portion have we in David? neither have we inheritance in the son of Jesse: to your tents, O Israel: now see to thine own house, David. So Israel departed unto their tents."

It was the old war-cry heard once before in the rebellion of Sheba against David, heeded now by the entire nation, except the two tribes of Judah and Benjamin. But while

the disruption under David's rule was only temporary, this time it proved final. Israel separated from the house of David, never to return. In all the turbulent days that followed, the northern tribes never showed any disposition to resume their old allegiance. Commonly after such revolutions there are left many adherents of the old *régime* who continually plot and plan for its restoration. If any such remained in Israel, they are unknown to history, and have accomplished nothing; the secession was complete and absolute.

From the point of view of the secular historian, this was merely a bold uprising against intolerable oppression, a splendid fore-gleam of that later-day temper when men should have more adequate conceptions of popular rights. Israel was stirred by no such peals of eloquence as fell from the lips of Patrick Henry. Jeroboam inculcated no such broad political ideas as did Richard Henry Lee and Samuel Adams, nor did he address the rebels in chosen words like those which have immortalized our Declaration of Independence. Still, Israel's secession betrayed the same spirit of resistance to tyranny that has stirred the men of later ages to their noblest achievements, and written in never-fading characters the most splendid and inspiring pages of history. In their bold remonstrance against wrongs we seem to hear the barons of England before King John demanding Magna Charta, or our American fathers expostulating with George III. over the abuses which brought about the Revolutionary War.

But the Bible carries us farther than the ordinary historian could have done, in proclaiming the ultimate reason for Israel's course. In reading of human affairs we are commonly so absorbed in the actions of men that we fail to trace God's hand. The Old Testament never permits this. It continually asserts and reiterates the divine government of the

world. "Wherefore the king hearkened not unto the people; for the cause was from the Lord."

God was in Israel's history, but he is equally in all history. He guided Israel with a very special purpose, yet no more truly or constantly than he guides us. Had an inspired penman written American history, how differently would it read from what is set down in our manuals! Sometimes in religious speech we timidly suggest that God may have had a purpose in this or that event of our past; an inspired historian would have made God the most prominent factor in it all. If from the study of this ancient record we learn to interpret our own lives and the lives of all men and all nations in the spirit in which the sacred historian wrote of Israel and Judah, we shall have learned its main lesson,—one which no amount of antiquarian research could have taught: God rules in this world of ours. He exalts one, casts down another, and makes the very wrath of man to praise him.

There are many special lessons in this history, to only a few of which can we refer, and that briefly.

1. Israel's secession "was from the Lord." From terrible, relentless, persistent tyranny, after due but vain remonstrance, subjects have a divine right to free themselves by revolution. "The powers that be are ordained of God," but no particular form of polity is so. Rulers exist for subjects, not subjects for rulers. The government of a nation at any time presumably deserves respect and support; but it may forfeit all claim to both by ceasing to fulfil its function as a blessing to the people. In certain parts of the world, though happily no longer in our own, this truth requires emphasis to-day. Still does it need to reverberate in many a monarch's ears: thy subjects "will be thy servants forever" on the condition, and only thereon, that "thou wilt be a servant unto this people, and wilt serve them and speak good words unto

them." If other policy be persisted in, "see to thine own house, David."

2. Observe the pusillanimity of pride. Pride seems a source of strength: it is rather a source of weakness; it prevents one from acting according to his best light. Rehoboam must in his first calm moment have felt convinced of the superior wisdom of the course urged by the older counsellors. His own better judgment, young as he was, would have suggested it. But the words of the younger men appealed to his pride and momentarily blinded him to their folly. Perhaps he feared that these coxcombs would laugh at him if he followed the conciliatory method, while he foolishly hoped to win their admiration by bluster and brag. How many a young man is equally a fool, — too haughty to follow his better judgment, too proud to accept good advice!

3. Consider how expensive such senseless pride may become. It cost Rehoboam far the best part of his dominions. Israel rather than Judah fills the chief place in the history of the next few centuries. Henceforth until the fall of Samaria Israel is ever upon the historian's page, Judah occupying a subordinate place. Israel possessed the fertile plains and the sea-coast; Judah had nothing but her barren hills. It was Jerusalem alone that saved Judah from utter insignificance. The history of Israel is that of a nation; Judah consisted of but a single great and splendid city. Rehoboam's pride was an expensive luxury, — it cost him the richest jewels in his crown. Ah! to many a man since has pride proved equally dear, costing him the chief portion of that heavenly patrimony which our Father bestows at birth upon all his sons.

4. Mark the peril of disregarding the wisdom of age. Had Rehoboam consulted only his seniors, he would have taken the right course. This his pride forbade. Was he not king?

Old men, fogies, the Bismarcks and the Gladstones, had carried on the State long enough. Like William of Germany in our day, he would show what wonders fresh blood and brain could do. Besides, was he not getting all the light he could, inquiring of all rather than of few? Many a youth has thus cheated himself into the belief that he was proceeding with great prudence, when in fact he merely wished an excuse for some darling folly. Old men are not always wise, but they are quite as likely to be so as young men; while a truly wise old man always has a species of wisdom impossible to those of fewer years. Let us by all means seek light when we need it; but may God give us grace to go for it to the sources whence it is most sure to come!

5. Notice, finally, that serving is the only way to win true fortunes. How numerous are the applications of this principle in the household, in the workshop, in society, in government! If employers only treated their employees in this spirit, how it would assuage the friction between the two, to the advantage of both! If laborers always acted in this temper of love, what added strength it would assure to laboring men's organizations! If our civil officers recognized this principle in their acts and policy, how much more sure, upon the average, at any rate, would they be of permanent place and power! We remember the answer of one on being justly accused of perverting high office to the most selfish purposes: "What are you going to do about it?" The whole world knows that man's fate and execrates his memory. Yes, divine truth is valid for men in every station. The politician, the ruler, the capitalist, the labor-leader, like all other men, would be wise to learn that our highest and noblest rights are our duties.

How perfectly did the course of our divine Lord and Saviour illustrate this! He came to win the world. How was it to be done? Had he been a mere man, he would



never have sought to attain his end in the way he did. He might have made his progress through the world a proud triumphal march. He might have disclosed his wisdom by colloquies with learned men, his power by great and marvellous works, his goodness by ostentatious beneficence. This would have been man's method. But God's ways are not as ours. Instead of appearing as a grand monarch, ministered unto, courted, and flattered, he came as a servant, ministering ever unto others. Instead of being rich, he had not where to lay his head. Instead of courting the great and wise, he sought the poor and lowly. And he has in this world a Name which is above every name, at whose mention millions of hearts rise and millions of heads bow in loving adoration. He has won the world by serving the world. Would you be rich with God's eternal gold? Behold, here is the way! Wherefore, my brethren, "let this mind be in you which was also in Christ Jesus," who "came not to be ministered unto, but to minister, and to give his life a ransom for many."



## Lesson II. January 11.

---

### IDOLATRY IN ISRAEL.

*1 Kings xii: 25-33.*

BY REV. F. W. RYDER, BOSTON, MASS.

"HISTORY is God teaching by example." All history is that. The vicissitudes of the history of New England, not less than those of the history of Israel, publish God's will and God's sentiments towards men. The story of every nation is an object-lesson hung on the walls of the world's school-room, whence the ages as they pass may learn of God.

But the annals of the Hebrew race possess a peculiar interest, because in them the divine tuition is divinely interpreted. In the historical books of the Old Testament we have the record of a revelation rather than the revelation itself. The real revelation lies in the national life, of which the books are partly an account, partly an interpretation.

The importance of Israelitish history lies largely in the plainness and authority with which it reveals God's presence in human affairs. Perhaps in no period are these divine instructions clearer than in those troublous times that followed the disruption of Solomon's kingdom. The previous lesson has told us how Israel passed the summit of its glory; how the headstrong vanity of Rehoboam provoked a revolt; and how ten tribes, far the larger and better half, seceded to form a new nation.

Of this Jeroboam became king. Born in humble circumstances, he had risen by dint of his energy and genius to a

place so prominent in public affairs that he was suspected of aspiring to royalty. In every age, in spite of custom, caste, or condition, the men who are determined to rise will rise.

#### OPPORTUNITY.

Seated at last firmly on his throne, Jeroboam was face to face with the opportunity of his life. He stood at the dividing paths, one of which, though fair to the eye, ran to ruin and contempt; the other, rough and perilous, would, if followed, have brought the nation to prosperity and himself to eminent renown. Which would he take?

It was a decisive hour in the young ruler's career. His future and the fate of a kingdom hung in the balance. Should he determine to serve God, work righteousness, lighten oppression, promote religion, — should he prove strong to do all that Jehovah his God commanded, — he might easily make himself the mightiest monarch, and his people the foremost nation of the age. God would then be with him. But if he disregarded these high ends, his kingdom would come to nought, and his name be a hissing and a by-word. God would be against him.

Strange that Jeroboam did not comprehend this. No lesson was more clearly taught in the history of his country. Over and over again had it been demonstrated that loyalty to Jehovah insured national advancement, and that apostasy was a sure forerunner of discord, weakness, ruin.

Jeroboam is not alone in this fault. For nations and rulers to meet and lose such crucial chances is not at all uncommon. The Emperor of all the Russias confronts to-day a similar situation. He has it in his power to make for himself a distinguished name in the catalogue of mankind's benefactors. Let him abandon his barbarous policy of rule by brute force; let him proclaim liberty, free speech, free conscience, and all the other inalienable rights of man; let

him as a true sovereign devote himself to the social, industrial, political, and religious welfare of his subjects, and he will bring his empire with one bound to the very zenith of power and prosperity, gaining for himself a fame second to that of few men in all history. Alexis seems as blind as Jeroboam to his magnificent opportunity.

Fifty years ago the Christian Church in America was offered an even grander privilege. Four million human beings groaned in bitter bondage. Their cry passed the ear of man unheeded; their shackled hands outstretched brought no deliverer. What a glorious chance for the Church, as the champion of the oppressed, to step forward and demand in the name of the Lord that the black man have his rights! Duty, righteousness, religion, and humanity alike bade her put herself squarely on the side of the slave. Alas! she did not do so. Instead, her ministers, whose business it was to proclaim liberty to captives, and the opening of prisons to those in bonds, were, many of them, busily ransacking Scripture for sanctions to the very wrong that needed righting. Not until the skies were red with presages of war, and God's indignation flamed across the heavens in tokens plainer than the handwriting on Belshazzar's palace-wall, did the Church as a whole come into the fight for freedom.

Not less is to-day, for Church and nation, a day of judgment. The terrible industrial crisis through which we are passing, the rights and wrongs of the working-man, the just relation of capital to labor, and of government to both, the problem of the black, of the red, and of the yellow race, political corruption, commercial monopoly, sectional animosity, — these are so many bars of divine justice before which we are haled, and at which the searching tests of character are applied. To-day, as ever, conventionalities, expediences, prejudices, array themselves against righteousness, justice, truth. Which shall we choose?

There is, therefore, nothing singular in Jeroboam's case; we all often stand where he stood. Not "once," as Lowell hath it, but often —

"To every man and nation comes the moment to decide,  
In the strife of Truth with Falsehood, for the good or evil side.  
Some great cause, God's new Messiah, offering each the bloom or blight,  
Parts the goats upon the left hand, and the sheep upon the right,  
And the choice goes by forever, 'twixt that darkness and that light."

One immortal precept Jeroboam's case vividly illustrates, — the only safe path is the right path. Our salvation from failure and shame lies in being absolutely true to our deepest convictions of right, unswervingly loyal to what we know of God's will.

#### EXPEDIENCY VERSUS RIGHTEOUSNESS.

Before his great opportunity Jeroboam failed. The causes of his downfall were all the more seductive because they seemed to be justified by the soundest maxims of governmental policy. It would never do, he reasoned, to have the centre of the national religion in a foreign city, and especially in the chief city of the country from which his subjects had just seceded. They might as safely have the seat of government in the capital of a rival nation as to have the seat of religion there. If the people continued to go up to the prominent feasts at Jerusalem, there was danger of a revolution backward. The old ties might prove too strong. Religious scruples might overcome political considerations. The bonds of a common lineage and history might knit themselves again, and his kingdom come to an untimely end. It was necessary to isolate the nation religiously as well as governmentally. The secession must be complete.

To this end Jeroboam now devoted his energies. Having fortified some of the chief cities of his realm, he set to work to create a public sentiment favorable to his scheme. "It is

too much," he said to the people, "for you to go up to Jerusalem." There was plausibility in this plea. The journey was long, laborious, expensive. What was the need of it?

Devices to lighten the stress of duty, or give a liberal interpretation to moral obligations, are apt to be popular. The new arrangement seems to have sprung into general favor at once. Following up the advantage thus gained, the king established two centres of worship, — one at Bethel, a place already sanctified by many sacred events; the other at Dan, on the northern frontier.

So, for mere political ends, the national connection with the religion which God had ordained was broken off. Jeroboam had made a fatal mistake. He had set politics before religion, chosen convenience instead of duty, made expediency take the place of righteousness. Disastrous consequences always follow a choice like that. The blunder is one which politicians and business men seem especially liable to perpetrate. Keen-sighted men are often short-sighted. They see vividly, but only at close range, like those party leaders whose foresight does not extend beyond the next election. Occasionally the whole nation is smitten with moral myopia. An immediate emergency eclipses everything else, and iniquitous means are justified by the alleged necessity of getting through it. The far-reaching consequence, the fateful outcome of wrath and ruin, at the peril of which the temporary success is bought, is not seen at all.

But the immutable laws move relentlessly on to exact in due season their last ounce of penalty. "They enslave their children's children who make compromise with sin," saith the Delphic Oracle. Thousands of Esaus are all the time peddling their birthrights for messes of pottage. For the sake of temporary gain, or the gratification of a present desire, or to tide over an immediate crisis, they put in pawn their

manhood, purity, and honor, and mortgage their future to the Devil.

We see the same continually in business, as men, in their haste to be rich, resort to dishonest practices, or attempt "short cuts" to fortune. We see it perpetually in politics, where the magnificent inheritances of to-morrow are sacrificed to the petty gains of to-day; where triumphant electioneering becomes paramount to the public weal, and honest citizens, lashed into submission by the party whip, assist in the passage of infamous measures or the election of infamous men.

This evil tendency is greatly increased by current sentiments about success. Success is a cardinal virtue with most of us. We worship the goddess of victory. Having exalted to a superlative rank the matter of gaining our end, the severity with which we criticise the means is inversely as the degree of success hoped for. The great thing nowadays is to get ahead, — by honorable courses if one can; but to get ahead. Do we not teach our children so? To be sure, the process will likely involve unpleasant particulars, such as defrauding, defeating, and slaying numerous competitors. Yet if one wins anyhow a notable victory, we do not scrutinize closely the stratagems by which he wins. Success covers a multitude of sins. The capitalist devours widows' houses, starves his workmen, debauches legislatures, defeats the public good. Nevertheless, if he becomes a millionaire, all is forgiven. The politician buys votes, subsidizes the press, corrupts public sentiment, prostitutes the government to party ends. Still, if he carries the election, people are not over-inquisitive as to how he did it. It is the man who fails whose wicked devices are published and punished.

Jeroboam felt that he must succeed. Ambition made him blind to the moral bearings of his plan. He thought he could win, though thwarting God's will and breaking his

explicit commands. In so doing he unsettled the foundations of his kingdom, and made his name disgraceful through all his nation's history.

Herein he is a warning to us. Whoever puts policy before religion, chooses convenience before duty, or makes expediency a greater thing than righteousness, has foredoomed his career to ultimate failure, and his name to certain shame.

#### IDOLATRY.

One false step necessitates a second. Having adopted his policy, the new king must needs devise suitable means for carrying it out. An evil aim and end calls for evil devices. If the people went to Dan and Bethel to worship, something must be there for them to worship. The temple at Jerusalem could not be transported, the Shekinah would not be. Jeroboam was forced to provide substitutes. So he built sanctuaries at Bethel and Dan, in each of which he set up an idol in the form of a calf, richly overlaid with gold. Long residence in Egypt had made him familiar with idolatrous rites. Perhaps the suggestion came in that way. Or, as the dedicatory formula seems to indicate, the hint may have been taken from the idolatry into which Israel fell at Sinai.

The results of Aaron's experiment, however, would seem sufficient to have deterred any one from imitating it. Common-sense should have perceived the advisability of making as few changes as need be, and of introducing gradually such as were imperative. The religious sense of the worthiest classes was sure to be shocked at any radical alterations in the established order. But the king, having entered upon a wrong road, went rashly on. The great annual festival, the Feast of Tabernacles, was moved forward to the corresponding day of the eighth month,—probably on the ground that the harvest whose gathering it celebrated came a little



later in the northern kingdom. The most daring innovation of all consisted in supplanting the existing corps of religious officials by a new levy raised from among the common people.

The priests and Levites residing in the country appear to have revolted against the new religion, and to have refused to offer sacrifices before the golden calves that Jeroboam had set up. In a parallel account (2 Chron. xi.) we are told that "the priests and the Levites that were in all Israel resorted to him [Rehoboam] out of all their border. For the Levites left their suburbs and their possession, and came to Judah and Jerusalem: for Jeroboam and his sons cast them off, that they should not execute the priest's office unto the Lord: and he appointed him priests for the high places, and for the he-goats and for the calves which he had made." Rulers who attempt to carry out iniquitous innovations against the religious convictions of their best subjects are often forced to extremes that at first they did not contemplate.

The king's course made him chief transgressor in a great national sin. The bulk of the people submitted to the new dispensation and brought their offerings to the high places in Bethel and Dan. The quintessence of idolatry is the substitution of something else in the place of God. It may be a golden calf or a golden dollar. Whatsoever is made to stand in God's place in man's life is an idol, and whosoever puts it there is a servant of idols.

It is argued by some commentators that this was not idolatry in the strict sense, but only the worship of Jehovah under the form of a calf. And indeed the phrase may read, "This is thy God, O Israel, that brought thee up out of the land of Egypt." Be that as it may, Jehovah had expressly forbidden men to worship him in that fashion, for the wise reason that worship by the aid of sensuous



forms invariably degenerates among the masses into actual idolatry. The making of images results in the worship of false gods.

Fifty years later, in the days of Elijah the reformer, we find the nation wholly given over to idols. The worship of Jehovah had almost entirely ceased. Baal, Astarte, and Moloch were the reigning deities. 'T is ever thus. Intelligent heathen declare that their religion does not inculcate the worship of the idol, but of the god by means of the idol. Nevertheless the mass of their people bow down simply to wood and stone. Catholic prelates contend that images are used in their services merely to stimulate the spiritual senses by aid of the physical. But thousands in that communion, contrary to this fine theory, actually worship the image.

Idolatry involves also the sin of disobedience. God had said, "Thou shalt not." This Jeroboam well knew. He ought to have remembered the hot displeasure with which in the history of his nation infractions of God's will had been punished. What a strange infatuation possesses men who suppose that they can please God while doing the very things which he has sternly forbidden ! Yet men are guilty of this folly all the time. When the life is absorbed in business or pleasure, when the greed for gold or the lust for power, the chief idolatries of our day, becomes the supreme affection of the soul, then is broken the greatest commandment of all, "Thou shalt love the Lord thy God with all thy heart, and thy neighbor as thyself," and a sin is committed for which no amount of ritual observance or professional piety can atone.

But the crowning iniquity of Jeroboam, for which more than for all else he was condemned, was that he used the public power, the divinely bestowed authority of the state, for the furtherance of ungodliness. There is a warning here for legislators who legalize a nefarious traffic, give respectability to lotteries and gambling-dens, or load unjust taxes upon the

poor and weak, and for rulers who wink at bribery, theft, and other wickedness in high places.

#### DOOM.

In his procedure Jeroboam overlooked a universal law. Consequences are inevitable. Effects follow their causes. Every road has its proper terminus, every seed its peculiar harvest. Choose your course, and you will come to the end of it. Sow your seed; you must reap the sort of grain which you have sown. Flesh and corruption, wind and whirlwind, spirit and life, obedience and blessing, transgression and ruin : these things go in these pairs. The two names in each pair are but two names for the selfsame thing. In natural matters, in physical science, this principle is everywhere respected; in spiritual it is almost universally ignored. Since the foundation of the world men have been doing evil that good might come, seeking blessedness by the way of the transgressor, sowing tares and watching for wheat.

Jeroboam had set out to make his kingdom secure. With curious insanity he had chosen the shortest, surest way to defeat that very design. Trampling on the rights of man and defying the commandments of God, he brought upon himself and his nation the fearful consequences of his sin. Even as he stood by the unholy altar to offer impious sacrifice, the feet of the foredooming prophet were drawing nigh.

So this strong young ruler, who received his commission from God and set out with the fairest auguries for a brilliant career, made such shipwreck of his opportunity, so preferred expediency to righteousness, so turned and turned his people to idolatry, that the worst doom possible to man came upon him, — the loss of God's favor; and he has ever since been remembered, as he must be forever, by the bitter epitaph, which is repeated like a refrain through all the later Scriptures : "Jeroboam the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin."

### Lesson III. January 18.

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## GOD'S CARE OF ELIJAH.

*1 Kings xvii: 1-16.*

BY REV. P. A. NORDELL, NEW LONDON, CONN.

THE religion of Israel consisted mainly of two elements,— law and prophecy. Each of these is forever associated with one of the most extraordinary characters in sacred history. Moses is the representative of that divine law which bound Israel in a perpetual covenant to Jehovah's service. Elijah is the representative of that spirit of prophecy which sought to keep the covenant in force by vivifying and deepening the national sense of obligation. The one was commissioned to bring God into the consciousness and daily life of the people; the other, to bring the rebellious nation back to God. In point of time Elijah, the restorer of the covenant, stood about midway between Moses its founder and Christ its end. Most fittingly, therefore, do these two reappear in the transfigured presence of him who was the End of the law, the Fulfilment of prophecy, the real Founder and perpetual Upholder of that spiritual kingdom of which Israel was only an imperfect and vanishing type.

#### I. GOD'S SERVANT AND HIS FEARLESS MESSAGE.

To feel the significance of Elijah's message we must understand, in some measure, the political and religious condition of the northern kingdom.

A little over fifty years had elapsed since the death of Solomon and the division of the monarchy into the rival kingdoms of Israel and Judah. In Israel these years had witnessed almost continual usurpations, crimes, and bloodshed. Under Ahab's reign peace was restored, internal prosperity secured, commerce with the surrounding nations promoted, liberal arts encouraged, and the tastes of the court and nobles for splendor and luxury gratified to an extent hitherto unheard of. But while political and social disaster had been averted for a time, the religious degeneracy had been continuous and rapid. Jeroboam, in introducing the worship of the golden calves, had probably no intention of breaking away entirely from the worship of Jehovah, but merely desired to strengthen himself on the throne by terminating for his ten tribes the ancient custom of going up to Jerusalem every year to worship. This violation of the law against worshipping God by means of images resulted, as all departure from God invariably does, in still deeper alienation. It prepared the way for the full introduction of heathenism under Omri, and for what seemed to be the total extinction of the old religion under Ahab.

The fatal defect in Ahab's character was not wickedness, but weakness. A man who wields great power had almost better be wicked than weak; a strong-minded sinner, controlled only by his own indwelling devil, may at times be restrained by a sense of responsibility, whereas a weak man in power is entered into and possessed by seven devils each sevenfold worse than his own. Stripped of his power, Ahab might have been a comparatively harmless man; but invested with it, and controlled by others, he "did yet more to provoke the Lord, the God of Israel, to anger than all the kings of Israel that were before him." He became a pliant tool in the hands of Jezebel, his ambitious and unscrupulous Phœnician queen. In her fanatical hatred of the worship of

Jehovah, and fixed determination to exterminate it from the land, she stopped at no crime, however black, at no outrage, let it be never so high-handed.

The religious situation was dark and desperate. Jehovah's prophets had been hunted and slain, his altars had been thrown down. The prophets of Baal were everywhere received with royal favor and sumptuously cared for. Magnificent temples were built for his images. The deification of Lust in the worship of Ashtoreth, the Phœnician Venus, spread over the land like a moral pestilence. Every ray of true religious light seemed on the point of extinction. Events were rapidly precipitating the most momentous crisis ever experienced in the history of Israel. It seemed as if the last link of the old covenant that bound Israel to Jehovah's service was about to be broken. Peace rested upon the land, evil flourished unrebuked, and men thought that eternal justice was not only blind, but fast asleep. It was an ominous peace, like the dead silence before the crash of battle, or the momentary lull before the roar of the hurricane. Such peace, either for a nation or for an individual, always ends in a terrible awakening. In this instance it came when the bolt of Jehovah's judgment fell as from a cloudless sky; that bolt was Elijah.

Elijah was the prophet of fire. With the suddenness of a lightning flash he appears on the pages of history as well as before the king of Israel. Just such a man was demanded by the times, — a man of bold, determined action, rather than of peaceful words. There are times when the ordinary means of impressing men seem to have lost their power. Sermons the most eloquent, arguments the most logical, pleas the most tender, fall on human hearts like rain on rocks. Nothing less than the most striking manifestations of divine judgment suffice to arrest men in their headlong descent to ruin. So Israel needed now, not preaching, but unanswerable de-

monstrations of Jehovah's omnipotence. They needed to be convinced of his infinite superiority to the dead idols for whom the people had abandoned their service to the living and true God who had made the heavens and the earth. Elijah was the instrument that God had prepared for this work.

Of Elijah's early history nothing is known beyond the fact that he was a Tishbite from the country east of the Jordan, — probably one of a company of Israelites who, moving temporarily beyond the boundaries of their own tribes, had taken up their sojourn in Gilead. Of his preparation for his work we know still less. Habituated, apparently, to desert solitudes, it may be inferred that, like the Baptist, the second Elijah, he was a genuine son of the desert, which stamped his character with its own simplicity and sternness. His long, thick hair — for he was a Nazarite — flowed over his broad shoulders like a lion's mane. He had the boldness of a lion and the fleetness of an antelope. With no settled habitation, he appeared now here, now there ; and when his enemies sought him, disappeared again as mysteriously as though the earth had opened beneath his feet.

Such was the man who, clad in a simple tunic and a sheepskin mantle, appeared before the astonished king of Israel. Without preamble he delivers his amazing message : " As the Lord, the God of Israel, liveth, before whom I stand, there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word." Before the king had time to reflect, the apparition was gone.

The message was clear and unmistakable. It required neither explanation nor justification. There are innumerable instances where God's judgments are " a great deep " and fathomless. The stricken heart in its anguish questions why God's hand is laid so heavily upon it. But in Ahab's case there was no mystery. The punishment announced

was the well-known penalty attached to a violation of the national covenant with God. If Israel kept the covenant, then the Lord promised, "I will give the rain of your land in its season, the former rain and the latter rain, that thou mayest gather in thy corn, and thy wine, and thine oil. And I will give grass in thy fields for thy cattle, and thou shalt eat and be full." But if Israel broke the covenant, and served other gods, then all these blessings would be reversed. "Thy heaven that is over thy head shall be brass, and the earth that is under thee shall be iron. The Lord shall make the rain of thy land powder and dust: from heaven shall it come down upon thee, until thou be destroyed." It was the very result that Ahab had defiantly invited, — a specific penalty for a specific sin. The connection between the two may not always be so clear as here; but we may be absolutely certain that penalty of some sort answers to sin, even as face answers to face in the glass.

Elijah's words implied far more than they stated. Since Baal was worshipped as the god of reproduction and fertility in nature, the impending drought was a direct challenge to Baal to save his followers from Jehovah's power if he could. Over against such "dead idols" Jehovah was fitly characterized as the living God, whose sleepless eyes were upon all his works. He was "the God of Israel." The nation belonged to him. He had chosen it from among the other nations, had set his love upon it, and bound it to himself in a marriage covenant; as a man binds a wife. As a faithful wife, Israel owed to him the purest love and truest service. But Israel was a faithless wife, who deserted his holy service and shamelessly prostituted herself with the abominations of the heathen. This covenant-God was the one whom Elijah represented, "before whom he stood," who invested him with such amazing power and courage that he was enabled



singled-handed to perform prodigies of resistance to the overwhelming errors of his age. Better be in the minority with God than in the majority against him. Only a living faith in a living God, a profound consciousness of oneness with his will can inspire the loftiest exhibitions of courage. What man, solitary and alone, can sustain a conflict against the world? Only he who knows that he stands before God, and is not answerable to men. Elijah possessed this profound sense of oneness with God, for in delivering his message he spoke as from himself, — “there shall not be dew nor rain these years, but according to my word.” It is easy to see how in the extraordinary authority claimed by him he contrasted himself with the impotent impostors who professed to stand for Baal. Baal’s prophets were as helpless as himself. Intrenched behind royal power, they felt secure in their triumph over Jehovah’s prophets. But in the presence of Elijah their pomp of power proved only a delusion and a snare. It is always so with the wicked; in the day of God’s judgments they “are like the chaff which the wind driveth away.”

## II. GOD’S CARE FOR HIS SERVANT.

The Lord’s care for Elijah is shown in two ways. In the first place, he preserves him from personal danger; and in the second place, during the prevalence of the drought he miraculously supplies all his personal needs.

What immediate impression the message had on Ahab’s mind we have no means of knowing. Possibly he may have felt a lingering touch of conscience. His weakness of character may have led him to fear the stern and foreboding words. But if so, Jezebel, his evil genius, would soon dispel his fears and silence the voice of conscience. “What! has one of those impudent curs come out from his hiding-place? Has he dared to speak in the name of Israel’s dethroned God, and really threatened a withholding of rain? Let not



the king fear! We shall soon know the emptiness of his boast, and the power of my lord Baal, who gives the rain in its season, and the corn, the oil, and the wine to those that call on him." And so the court and the priests fell to laughing immoderately at the vaporings of the mad fanatic; it was the standing joke of the season. Sinners, in their arrogant security, always find rare sport in laughing at God's threats.

Presently March came, — the time of the early rain; but no cloud dimmed the splendor of the eastern sky. "The rain is delayed," they said. "Wait a little; it will soon be here." But the days came and went. The sun smote the doomed land with merciless strength. From the cerulean depths the stars looked down at night; but their brilliancy mocked the eye that watched for a gathering mist. The slanting rays of the morning sun were broken into no rainbow tints by glistening dew; and men said, "It is only a natural calamity." Their proud security was not disturbed. Wearily the days wore by until October, — the season for the latter rain; but the scorched hills only took on a deeper brown, the baked earth became harder still. It is difficult for us to comprehend the full horrors of an Eastern drought; it means famine and pestilence, the extinction of life, universal death.

The mocking laughter at Jehovah's prophet now died away in deep anxiety, or gave way to furious anger. In every adjacent land the king's emissaries sought Elijah that, by importunity, torture, or death, they might break the fatal spell. But in vain; for the Lord had hidden him — in some cavern, it may be — among the steep and rocky defiles of the brook Cherith. Here was water. At evening, according to God's promise, strange messengers — a flock of ravens — came bringing meat and bread. Morning and evening his need was supplied by them. Never shall those that put their trust in God be put to shame; but sometimes the divine care shows itself in an extraordinary way.

In Elijah's withdrawal from the abodes of men there was a higher purpose than mere personal safety. In the silence and solitude of the desert, with no fellowship but his own thoughts, he learned lessons of humble dependence and faith, of holy enthusiasm for God, and of inexorable severity toward the ungodly. It is a wonderful preparation for hard duty to be shut up alone with God. Before entering on the great work of his life he needed another lesson of gentle compassion and ready helpfulness toward the needy and oppressed. The desert could not teach him this. And so it came to pass that by and by even the Cherith dried up, and he was forced to seek another shelter.

Then the word of the Lord came again to Elijah, directing him to go toward Sidon in Phœnicia, Jezebel's early home. Surely none would think of looking for him there! As at a later date saints were found in Cæsar's household, so now there seemed to be a worshipper of the true God even in this centre of that abominable heathenism which passed over into Israel and had poisoned its life like a leprosy. The story of the prophet's meeting with the woman of Zarephath is full of pathos and beauty. She had gone out to gather a few sticks with which to prepare the little meal that yet remained in the small jar, — not "barrel." The poor, even in prosperous times, seldom buy their flour by the barrel, much less so when food is at famine prices. Had she not been a worshipper of Jehovah, and possessed a faith such as was not found in Israel, she would scarcely have shared that last morsel of food with the weary and hungry man of God. But she believed God's promise that the jar of meal should not waste, nor the cruse of oil fail, until the day when the Lord would send rain upon the earth. Wonderful as were her unquestioning faith and prompt obedience, still more wonderful was her reward. It included not only a supply of meal and oil for herself and all her family, but the resto-

ration of her son to life. Possibly one greater than Elijah had this very incident in mind when he said, "He that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward." In this widow's home Elijah learned the important lesson that God's sympathy and love are broader than the bounds of a single people.

Notwithstanding the fact that the present tendency of criticism is strongly toward a denial of the miraculous, we are constrained to accept these events as incontestable facts rather than as literary decorations. The reign of law is the most magnificent discovery of modern science. It shows us that the processes of nature are uniform, that nothing is arbitrary, nothing capricious. But natural science is related only to physical forces and phenomena. It can never prove that above this material world there is not a spiritual universe whose forces at rare intervals dip down into the natural and produce results that men call miraculous. Miracles are not interruptions of the natural order, but exhibitions of other and higher than physical forces. They testify to the existence of a God who is not the slave of his own laws.

Still, God prefers to reveal his care through secondary causes rather than by direct displays of power. He can interpose miraculously if he chooses. But we are not entitled to expect interference with the orderly processes of nature in our behalf. God has not promised this. Yet it is a matter of frequent observation that in answer to prayer, or for the supply of human needs, results are brought about by purely natural means so startling, so exactly corresponding to the thing sought, as to be scarcely less amazing than direct miracle. No man has ever lived who could stand up and from personal experience deny that "the mercy of the Lord is from everlasting to everlasting to such as keep his covenant," or that "he satisfieth the longing soul and filleth the

hungry soul with goodness ;" who could say, " I have tried it, and have found that the man is not blessed who trusts in the Lord. I have served him, and it does not pay ; trusted him, and met nothing but disappointments." In some way, it may be the most unexpected, the Lord will provide. If there is need of it, even the ravens become his willing messengers. Our Father in heaven never withholds from his children their daily bread. He may not give affluence and luxury, but the meal and the oil will not fail. Drawing upon it for all we need does not diminish to-morrow's supply. " Blessed are all they that put their trust in him."

Oh, for the spirit of Elijah in our day,— for a spirit of such self-surrender to the Lord, " before whom we stand," that we may be his prophets, speaking for him to an idolatrous world and to a worldly church ! The Lord's messengers too often shrink from delivering his message in its stern severity. The world, and the Church too, would rather hear of a God who is all love than of one who is a consuming fire toward the wicked. Those who fear to deliver Elijah's message can never have Elijah's power. Fiery zeal and holy enthusiasm are nourished by a close and constant walk with God. They are choked in the deadly miasms of the world. Blessed is the man who fearlessly does every duty that God lays upon him ! Though hunted by enemies and exposed to hardships, he shall dwell securely under the shadow of the Almighty.

## Lesson IV. January 25.

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# ELIJAH AND THE PROPHETS OF BAAL.

*1 Kings xviii: 25-39.*

BY REV. C. J. BALDWIN, GRANVILLE, OHIO.

THE contest between Elijah and the priests of Baal on Mount Carmel is one of the most dramatic scenes in human history. Romance may be challenged to rival that weird tragedy, enacted on a lofty mountain summit, with the multitudes of Israel for spectators, and the representatives of hostile religions for actors. The strange contrasts, the intense competition, the failure and the victory, with the terrible punishment crowning all, compose a picture of epic sublimity.

But the symbolism of the narrative is even more impressive; for it portrays many features of the contest perpetually raging between Truth and Error, Good and Evil, in this world.

1. *We are reminded of the great disparity between these opposing forces.* Now, as then, Truth is in the minority. It was one man against four hundred and fifty. And Elijah was not only alone, he was obscure and unfavored of earth, while his opponents were both numerous and also the officials of a state religion. The prophet of God was, moreover, an outlaw under the royal ban, while the priests of Baal were the favorites of king and people.

Thus Right was at an enormous disadvantage on Mount Carmel. Humanly speaking, it was a one-sided conflict, where all the probabilities were in favor of the enemies of Good.

But so it is always. The world has never seen a popular majority for the truth. Only eight souls were saved in the ark; Abraham was alone in his faith; Israel was but a handful; and the "peculiar peoples" in every age have been "a remnant." Even the Son of God did not restore the equilibrium. The Reformation effected but a partial equalization. The present age of missions, with all its conquests, finds the Church outnumbered in every region by its foes. Not only so, but in respect to earthly rank, power, prestige, the advantage has always been on the side of error. If at intervals the tide seems to turn, as when David, Solomon, Constantine, give to religious truth political pre-eminence, such episodes are transient, and soon the old disproportion returns.

"Truth forever on the scaffold,  
Wrong forever on the throne,"

abides as the rule obtaining in every age for the fortunes of the kingdom of heaven on earth.

2. *This disparity was intensified and emphasized by divine direction.* Elijah was commanded to give to his opponents precedence at every point. The criterion which he must submit for the testing of the rival religions was "the god that answereth by fire." That was a concession to the claims of Baal, who was called the "sun-god," with whom fire was a native element. The test proposed was, therefore, the most favorable one for his enemies that Elijah could have presented. Moreover, the pagans were to have their opportunity first, take all the time they wanted, and resort to any means for the securing of their victory. On the other hand, Elijah's task was rendered as difficult as possible. He must stand by and see his rivals consume the entire day. When his turn comes, at nightfall, he must cause his sacrifice to be flooded with water, and this to be done three times, until altar and trench are streaming and filled with the fluid. Then, when the sun has disappeared, and no fire remains in the sky,

he is simply to offer one brief prayer in order to bring down the lightning on his drenched offerings.

This magnifying of evil and minimizing of the resources of good has marked the divine policy from the first. God has seemed to give to sin every advantage that it could ask for, and to keep his own cause at a corresponding inferiority. What a surprising difference, according to earthly standards, between Jesus and his enemies! Not only was he alone, unfavored and unhelped, but they were supported by all the power of the Jewish church, the Gentile government, and even the infernal world. Sin was allowed to parade and employ its uttermost resources, while holiness seemed to be proportionately depressed in the person of Him who was born in a manger and reared at Nazareth, who became the Friend of publicans and sinners, was betrayed by his own followers, and condemned to the accursed death.

Similar fortunes have attended the people of God to this day. Not only have they been left to engage in a one-sided conflict where the numerical odds were always against them, but peculiar aggravations of this disparity have been common. It is noticeable that art has rendered to the cause of Error its noblest contributions, as in the service to the church of Rome of classic and Gothic architecture, painting, and sculpture. Philosophy and science have often come to the aid of the most pronounced infidelity. On which side of the great battle do we find the graces and grandeurs of this world in the wealth, luxury, and culture of the day?

The student of history has frequent occasion to remark, contrasted with these advantages, the strange disabilities under which true religion labors. The reformer is often a rash and erratic man, impeding his work by his own faults. The excesses of enthusiasts, the blemishes of martyr-lives, the grim asceticism of the Covenanters, the stern rigors of the Pilgrims, the irregularities of evangelists, the violence



of radicals,—are features of Christian progress which explain many of the defeats which Christians suffer.

The Church is still burdened with such unnecessary drawbacks. How often are we tempted to take literally the words which speak of the “foolishness of preaching,” and to wonder why God hath chosen such needlessly foolish, weak, and base things of this world to serve him!

Sin appears to suffer from few such impediments. Its course is open and clear. Its servants are in their native element, well trained, and effectively used. The world lieth in the Wicked One. Baal is invoked while the sun is high in the sky. “This is your hour,” is the divine permission to Satan. So Baal’s cause flourishes, while Elijah must stand and wait, to find, when his turn comes at last, that it is a drenched altar under a sunless sky on which he must call down fire.

3. *This disparity between the two contestants was emphasized by Jehovah for the purpose of suitably displaying his own superiority to both of them.*

He gave to Baal every advantage and reduced his own resources to a minimum, in order to show that Truth at its lowest is stronger than Error at its highest. The result justified this plan; for the people were all the more impressed by the final victory of Elijah, because of the tremendous inequality of the conflict at the beginning.

This gives us a clew to that policy of the divine government which has been referred to. God has allowed sin to prosper in this world, and has permitted his own religion to take an inferior place, for the purpose of thus furnishing an arena for the exhibition of the divine self-assertion. How are the spiritual lessons of history intensified by the fact that the truth is always in the minority! As we see Moses and Aaron confronting Pharaoh, the loneliness of Gideon and Samson, and the terrible isolation of



the three Hebrews before the fiery furnace, do we not find that very contrast magnifying the divine help that saved them ?

We understand, then, why Christianity has never been allowed to compete on equal terms with the dominant faiths of the world. God does not intend that his religion shall obscure Himself. He knows how readily the eye of man is caught and held by visible forms, and that spiritual truth is always endangered by material associations. Accordingly the earthly medium through which his grace shines must be as thin and plain as safety will permit. This was the reason why Jesus the Christ asked and received so little from the world. He owed nothing to its favor or its help. The Son of Mary walked the paths of humility and self-sacrifice alone. His miracles were few, and bare of theatrical effect. To most of its spectators, his death had no sacrificial significance. And before the new dispensation was fairly opened at Pentecost, he left the earth, to be seen of men no more. What a meagre manifestation of that Messiah for whom the world was waiting !

But as we now see, all that humiliation was the most effective background that could have been provided for the display of the spiritual kingdom of God. The lowly, obscure, and painful life of the Saviour was the best possible recommendation of those graces of love, purity, meekness, consecration, which he insisted upon as of chief worth. All men may now recognize that Christianity was not born of earthly conditions, and cannot be dependent on human help. It must be from Heaven, for it owes nothing to this world.

4. *The triumphs of grace thus obtained are also magnified by the divine concessions to the enemy.*

It was yielding much to Baal when the ordeal of fire was proposed, for that meant to meet the sun-god on his own field and with his own weapons. Other tests might have

been chosen which would have been more favorable to Elijah. But no; he must go into the enemy's territory and challenge him in his very citadel. And this to show that Jehovah can beat sin at its own game. He will come down to the terms of evil, grant it every advantage, and then surpass and extinguish it just where it is strongest.

This is what he is doing all the time. "The god that answereth by fire, let him be God." He compels evil to acknowledge him through its own oracles, and honor him from its own shrine.

Do the Egyptians worship the river Nile? Lo, the rod of Moses turns those sacred waters into blood. Are they the most cleanly of peoples, making a religion of physical purity? They are stricken with vermin by the word of the Lord. Do they idolize the goat, the ram, and the bull? The cattle of their fields must perish before the divine scourge. Thus Pharaoh is taught that even within the range of his own religion the God of the Hebrews can find means to overthrow him.

Similar transformations mark all the great conquests of Christianity. Jewish legalism receives its death blow from one of its own disciples, the converted Saul. Rome's greatest enemy is found in Luther, one of its children. Thus Jehovah conquers the fire-god with fire.

He meets scientific scepticism with the scientific faith of Miller, Hitchcock, and Drummond. He compels the art of sensuous Italy to minister to biblical truth in the Madonnas and Nativities. He transforms the pagan temple into the Christian church, and puts the Gothic spire to spiritual uses. This process of overruling and utilizing grace is spreading through all the ranges of human enterprise. Money-making and pleasure-seeking are being harnessed to religious purposes. Political economy is now beginning to teach the individualism and communism of the New Tes-

tament. The Gospel is finding its best service to-day in the workshop, the studio, the office, and in Parliament.

Why not? This is God's world, not Baal's. Jehovah is the true sun-god, and he can answer by fire as well as by any other natural agency, for all things are his. Even sin and death are concentric to the orbit of his purposes, and at last will be found tributary to his glory.

5. *These exhibitions of divine self-assertion furnish a severe but useful test of human character.* The priests of Baal were not the only ones whose faith and patience were taxed on Mount Carmel. It must have cost Elijah not a little to find himself placed for an entire day at so great a disadvantage. Nothing less than intense consecration and courage could have endured such a trial. He proved to be equal to the emergency; but the sarcastic outbursts with which he taunted his rivals on their failure may indicate the agitation of his own pent-up spirit.

This experience also was typical. It represents the lot of God's people in all ages. The very greatness of the divine interpositions in their behalf has imposed on them burdens of self-denial and self-effacement. It is always agreeable to be self-assertive and reliant. No one enjoys being put into inferior and obscure places. Especially do men feel this when summoned to work and conflict. Then the laborer is worthy of his hire, we think, and the warrior is entitled at least to recognition. But to do and endure without publicity or praise, is hard. Yet just that is what Jehovah requires of his people in all generations. They must be second, that he may be first; they weak, in order that he may be glorified; they must die, that his cause may live. Herein is the patience of the saints,—that Moses have nothing but a rod with which to confront Pharaoh, and David only a sling, and Peter neither silver nor gold. It is a trial, this poverty of their own as com-

pared with their enemies' advantages, that is always manifest in the experience of the godly. "Wilt thou not at this time restore the kingdom to Israel?" is the very natural cry that has been wrung from how many suffering souls! To stand by and see the wicked outnumber the good, outshine and outwork them; to note the glaring contrasts between the successes of Wrong and the many failures of Right; to see, as we see to-day, after all the ages of Christian progress, that the priests of Baal are still in the majority, and that Elijah often stands alone beside his wet altar under the fireless sky, — here is the ground of many a doubt and fear and weary pain in believers' hearts. Nor is this altogether unreasonable; for even the glorified on high are suffering likewise, as the souls of martyrs under the altar are still crying with a loud voice, "How long, O Lord, how long?"

But such experiences reveal to us the reason for this dispensation, in that it imposes a discipline which contributes to the perfect education of the saints. The graces of faith, humility, courage, patience, and self-sacrifice could not be developed so well under any other regimen. Therefore God hath chosen the foolish things of this world, and the weak and base and despised, to confound the wise and mighty, that no flesh should glory in his presence. "According as it is written, he that glorieth let him glory in the Lord."

6. *The trials of God's people are sure to result in their triumph as well as his glory.* Indeed the latter includes the former. Whatever glorifies the Master, honors the servant also. And just as surely as he requires of his followers self-sacrifice in the battle, does he reward them with an eminent share in the victory. It is Elijah who reaps the harvest at Carmel; it is Samson who receives the submission of the Philistines; it is David who wears the name of Goliath on his crest.

Thus God gives to his people ample recompense for all that he requires of them; yea, even in this life they receive a hundred fold. "Ye are they who have continued with me in my temptations, and I appoint unto you a kingdom."

Even so, Lord Jesus! Thou art a good paymaster, as thy servants always discover at the close of the day. No arrears of wage, no shortage of accounts with thee. The heavier the toil, the greater and the surer thy reward.

Oh that now, in the time of weariness and pain, when the soul stands, perhaps alone, before its enemies and sees them numerous and mighty, this prospect might open to the longing sight! When in the midst of unanswered prayers, unaccomplished purposes and broken plans and hopes, the latter-day prophet waits for the revelation that does not come, let the thought of others' patience and its reward reassure him. For as certainly as God must triumph at last, will all who serve him share his victory.

This study of the ancient narrative may help us to understand some of the methods of divine providence toward Christians now. When illness, poverty, persecution, befall them and reduce them to the lowest depth of human distress, let them not construe such dealings as mere deprivations. They may be precisely the reverse. It is in this way that Elijah is sometimes led to Carmel. The soul is torn away from all other help, and stripped bare of every other dependency, in order to force it back upon simple, sole trust in God. There it finds all-sufficient power and courage. Not until the thorn in the flesh had reduced him to despair did the Apostle reach the climax of hope: "When I am weak, then am I strong." Let us not despise the chastening of the Lord, but rejoice in this pathway to his glory.

Nor should any one be afraid of being in the minority. That is a familiar place for heroes. There the best work of the world has been done. Whittier has advised young men to attach themselves to some unpopular cause, for he knows that in such service the best training for the moral nature can be secured. Not that there is any necessary virtue in place with the minority. The few may be wrong as easily as the many. Mere singularity is no proof of rectitude. It is sometimes the evidence of egotism or natural contentiousness. To stand aloof and alone may be the result of pride.

The real question is, Where is God? "One with God is a majority." On what side of a given issue does his will stand? As matters go in this world, he is almost always with the few and against the many. And there should we be, not because isolation itself is meritorious, but because, siding with him, we are certain to be at once right and victorious.

## Lesson V. February 1.

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### ELIJAH AT HOREB.

*1 Kings xix: 1-18.*

BY REV. A. G. UPHAM, MONTREAL, CANADA.

ACTION is followed by reaction. A season of intense effort, anxiety, or excitement is usually succeeded by one of corresponding languor and weakness, in which the soul, unless fortified against it, falls an easy prey to temptation. So was it with Elijah after his conflict on Mount Carmel. That battle had taxed every power of his being. Soul and body alike had been strained by it to their utmost; and it is no wonder that when all was done a reaction came. This is the key to his conduct in the scene before us. His sudden flight, his deep despondency, his unworthy complaints, are all due primarily to this one cause. We have here, not a man who has suddenly lost his faith and turned coward, but a brave saint and prophet who is suffering recoil from intense effort long sustained.

We need not blame him for flight from Jezebel. He had not been commanded to stay, and it is difficult to see what he could have gained by staying. At other times he had had word from the Lord to strengthen him when he faced danger; now, apparently, God was silent, and what was left for him but to fall back upon the natural instinct of self-preservation and flee for his life? Jesus Christ commanded his followers when "persecuted in one city to flee into another." He would not have them expose themselves rashly



or fruitlessly in his cause. There are times when discretion is the better part of valor.

So far as Elijah's conduct on this occasion was blameworthy, the fault lay in his giving way to despondency after having reached a place of safety. Even this was due to the weariness from which he suffered; and God's treatment of him in the wilderness shows that he was a patient needing medicine more than a culprit needing rebuke. Let us consider, —

First, the causes of Elijah's despondency; secondly, God's remedy for this.

1. Prominent among the causes was physical exhaustion. The day on Carmel had subjected him to a heavy nervous strain. No work saps the body's vitality like that which draws upon the emotions. Then followed his wrestling in prayer for the rain. Agonizing prayer like his always deeply affects the body. Lastly came his long race before Ahab's chariot from Carmel to Jezreel, and his flight to the extreme south of the kingdom, and thence a day's journey into the wilderness, — a succession of trying experiences and efforts, all without opportunity for food or rest. No wonder that he was exhausted, and fell into much despair! No wonder that he thought his life a failure, and asked that he might die! It is hard for a man in such a physical condition to see anything in its right light.

2. Another cause of his despondency was enforced inactivity. On Carmel all had been action; in the wilderness there was nothing to do. The moment of exertion had passed, the time for reflection had come, — to how many an active soul a time of peril! So long as chance for action, endeavor, achievement remains, one even weaker than Elijah may endure and do wonders! The mind will control the body, and compel it to almost superhuman efforts. While her care is of avail, the mother nurses her sick child with



unremitting devotion, and does not know that she is tired. But when all is over, and nothing remains but the memory of a sweet life gone from earth forever, reaction comes; nature asserts itself, her physical power succumbs, and her mind, sympathizing with it in that mysterious but real way so well known to us all, tends to sink into despair. Nothing is more perilous to intense souls after great effort than enforced inactivity.

3. Another cause of Elijah's despondency was loneliness. Fleeing from Jezebel, he had taken his servant with him as far as Beersheba in Judah; but even here, although beyond the kingdom of Ahab, he did not feel safe. The son of the good king Jehoshaphat had married Jezebel's daughter, and Elijah dared not remain in a country where Ahab might possibly have influence. He therefore left his servant behind, and pushed still farther south.

Little, doubtless, could human society have helped him here. Elijah had always been a lonely man, dwelling by himself, seeking and enjoying none of the blessings of social intercourse. Such a habit necessarily cuts one off from much human sympathy. The man who adopts it surrounds himself with barriers. His fellows, even if they wish, cannot draw near to him with succor in his hour of need. In Elijah's case a monastic life was perhaps necessary. It was, at any rate, suited to his work. It may have been at this time quite in accord with his feelings to be alone. Still, had some wise and trusty friend been by him to cheer, to reason with him, enabling him to see his past work aright, or even to provide for his physical necessities, his despondency could not have been so extreme. "Two are better than one; because they have a good reward for their labor. For if they fall, the one will lift up his fellow; but woe to him that is alone when he falleth." There in the silent wilderness, after his long march, as he sat down under the tall broom-tree

midway between Palestine and Egypt, the tried prophet would have derived some help from the presence of his servant — of any man.

However, the deepest cause of Elijah's loneliness was not distance from his kind; it was religious. At that moment he was, as he thought, the only prophet of Jehovah remaining on earth. Either he had forgotten what the faithful Obadiah had lately told him of the one hundred prophets successfully hidden during a previous persecution, or else he supposed them dead, — numbered with the other faithful whom Jezebel's devilish zeal had taken off. Here was desolation indeed! In this awful moment he for the first time in his life felt it terrible to be alone. He groaned, "I, even I only am left; and they seek my life to take it away."

Deprived of all human companionship, and apparently left to fight the battle of the true religion single-handed, Elijah was thrown back upon the God who never leaves nor forsakes his servants, and whose presence realized will more than supply the lack of earthly friendships. That divine presence was graciously and wondrously vouchsafed him.

4. But the chief cause of Elijah's despondency now was disappointment. Doubtless he thought the triumph on Carmel the crowning effort of his life. He had sought and hoped then and there to bring his work to a climax, to accomplish his mission. At first he thought that he had succeeded. When the fire descended, the people cried, "Jehovah, he is the God! Jehovah, he is the God!" At his word they had destroyed the prophets of Baal in Ahab's own presence, who was too weak or too far paralyzed to resist. The rain, too, had come at Elijah's word, even as he had foretold. "Surely," he thought, "this will suffice! Ahab will be convinced, and will use his royal authority for the restoration of our ancestral faith."

But when Jezebel's threat of death was delivered to him,

and Ahab did not interfere, and not one of those who had shouted for Jehovah on Carmel lifted up hand or voice for him, he saw his mistake. Jezebel still reigned, evil remained triumphant, Jehovah's cause seemed as far from victory as ever, and his heroic deed, yea, his whole life-work, a failure. He wailed in despair, "It is enough; now, O Lord, take away my life, for I am not better than my fathers!" Possibly he expected too much from the Carmel victory. Perhaps he had an exaggerated idea of himself and his ministry. It was certainly very natural for his soul, when he thought of all he had done as in vain, to be cast down within him.

So much for the causes of Elijah's despondency. Now let us see how the Almighty dealt with his downcast and despairing servant.

1. He began where the beginning was needed,—by supplying Elijah's physical necessities. He gave his beloved sleep; and when he awoke him it was with an angel's gentle touch, and a word to "arise and eat." As he had been fed by ravens at Cherith and by a widow at Zarephath, so now he "did eat angels' food." Again he slept, and awoke, and ate; and "he went in the strength of that meat forty days and forty nights." Behold the wisdom and the goodness of God! He comes to revive the soul of his servant, and he begins by reviving his body. He knows that he cannot teach him in his present physical condition, therefore he prepares him for spiritual enlightenment by renewing his natural strength. Jesus Christ often reached the soul through the body, and healed the body for the sake of the soul. There is room and call for medical missions. Some spiritual disorders can be cured only when the body is relieved. If certain spiritual dyspeptics could get rid of their physical ailments, they would be far happier and more useful Christians. Not infrequently do desponding souls come to their pastor for relief when they would do better first to consult their physician.

2. The next thing God did for Elijah was to help him to a just estimate of his work. To this end he brought him to a fitting place for divine instruction, to a place where he had formerly made known his will, — to Horeb, “the mount of God.” Sceptics may sneer at the idea that it required forty days for Elijah to go from Beersheba to Horeb. Let them sneer; it shows how little they have entered into the spirit of this event. It was not the straightforward journey of a man who knew where he was going and why, but rather the wandering about of one in sore spiritual conflict, in bewilderment as to the meaning of his present situation.

But when at last he reached Horeb, light came. As he lay in one of the caves of that lonely mount, “the word of the Lord came to him, and he said unto him, What doest thou here, Elijah?” Why need we take this as a question of rebuke? It seems rather like the Saviour’s questions to those whom he would heal, — a gentle invitation to Elijah to unburden himself, to open his mind. “What doest thou here, Elijah? Under what hard necessity dost thou seek this distant spot? Why hast thou come to this holy place?” And when Elijah’s mournful, honest answer was given, telling of his own faithfulness and of Israel’s folly and sin, then came the divine instruction through the wind, the earthquake, the fire, and “the voice of gentle stillness.”

Let others understand this event as they will, we are content to regard it as a divine object-lesson in which God symbolically set forth the true nature and value of Elijah’s work, and showed him what yet remained to be done. His life had been like the wind, the earthquake, and the fire. He had been the prophet of judgment and wrath, and had done a necessary work in preparing the way for the restoration of Jehovah’s worship in Israel. But as God was not in the wind, or the earthquake, or the fire, but in the “still, small voice,” so Elijah was taught that God’s highest manifestation

of himself is not in judgment, but in mercy. Judgment is "his strange work," and "mercy rejoiceth against judgment." Elijah had destroyed the prophets of Baal, as was necessary to the uprooting of idolatry in Israel, even as John the Baptist, his great counterpart, should afterward "lay the axe unto the root of the tree" in his preaching of repentance. But as John's work, although necessary to prepare the way for the Christ, resulted in no kingdom, so Elijah's stern pioneer work could not build up Israel in righteousness. Only God's voice in the soul, constraining to loving obedience, could do that; and another must come, of a different mould from Elijah, before that voice could be heard.

3. God further comforted Elijah by sending him back to complete his work by seeking out and consecrating the one who was to take his place. "Go; return on thy way." He gave him something to do. He lifted him out of himself by sending him forth on a new commission. To one in Elijah's state of mind, work is often the best medicine. Many afflicted ones have found relief only by taking up the necessary duties of life which had been remitted, or by giving themselves to some new and worthy work. "Go, return on thy way to the wilderness of Damascus: and when thou comest, anoint Hazael to be king over Syria: and Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel: and Elisha the son of Shaphat of Abel-meholah shalt thou anoint to be prophet in thy room. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay: and him that escapeth the sword of Jehu shall Elisha slay." We need not puzzle ourselves unduly over Elijah's fulfilment of this commission. So far as the record goes, he did not literally *anoint* any one of these men. Hazael was informed by Elisha that he should be king over Syria. Jehu was anointed by one of the sons of the prophets. Elisha was called to the prophetic office by Elijah. Perhaps we

must fall back here on the principle that what one does through another he does by himself. Elisha's peaceful ministry warns us against taking this prophecy of violence too literally. Enough that each of these did the work appointed to him. Israel still needed chastisement, and Hazael and Jehu became the ministers of God to perform this. But as it was in the "still small voice" that God specially spake to Elijah, so Elisha with "the sword of his mouth" slew more than Hazael and Jehu together, and under God became Israel's savior.

So Elijah might even now be comforted. He had not done what he hoped to do. But God lived, and God was even now preparing instruments to carry on his work in the way he saw best. Elijah had no right to be disappointed. The best part of God's work for Israel was yet to come, and Elijah had been employed to prepare the way for this. It had been comparatively easy to get the people to cry out for Jehovah on Carmel; but that cry meant really very little. It is easy enough to win men to a church or a creed, very hard to win them to righteousness. But God means to win men to righteousness, and "he shall not fail nor be discouraged till he have set judgment in the earth." Let any servant of his count himself happy to have any share in such a work. In the great harvest day, Elijah and Elisha will "rejoice together."

4. Finally, God comforted Elijah with an assurance of the ultimate triumph of his cause. "Yet will I leave me seven thousand in Israel, all the knees which have not bowed to Baal, and every mouth which hath not kissed him." Elijah was not so much alone as he had thought. Even now there were those in Israel who were secretly serving Jehovah; and there always would be. Far better for Elijah had it been if these had come out boldly, and ranged themselves with him openly on Jehovah's side. It might have saved him from

his despondency had he known that there were so many in Israel who sympathized with him. Many faint-hearted pastors and Sunday-school teachers would be greatly helped by an occasional acknowledgment of good received from their efforts. God knew these seven thousand, and he would have Elijah know of them. His life had not been in vain. God's word had not "returned unto him void." It never will. In the darkest times of God's cause on earth there will always be "a remnant according to the election of grace." The number of his servants may be small compared with all the people on earth, but there will always be a "holy remnant," — the seed of a purified and triumphant Church in the future. There will always be Christians on earth; they are "the salt of the earth," "the light of the world." Against the Church, which is Christ's body, "the gates of hell shall not prevail."

Times of reaction come to us all; they are in the order of nature, and we must expect them. How shall we bear them? Does not God's gracious dealing with Elijah suggest an answer? He would not have us fall into such despondency as overcame Elijah; and his treatment of Elijah when fallen shows how he would help us to stand. It may be through rest or medicine; it may be through the counsels of a wise and trusty friend; it may be through prayer and the study of his word; it may be through wise and benign work. "Wherefore, take unto you the whole armor of God, that ye may be able to withstand in the evil day, and having done all, to stand."



Lesson VI. February 8.

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NABOTH'S VINEYARD AND AHAB'S  
COVETOUSNESS.

*1 Kings xxi: 1-16.*

BY REV. GEORGE E. MERRILL, NEWTON, MASS.

THE visitor to Potsdam in Prussia, from the terrace of the palace of Sans-Souci sees near at hand a gigantic windmill, the most conspicuous object in the landscape. He wonders that the bold miller should have dared to build so near. But on inquiry he learns that the mill was there before the palace. In it several generations of the same family had ground their grist and gathered their wealth ere the attention of the Prussian kings was directed to the town as a place of residence. When palace after palace arose, and the king came to see, behold! here was this ugly windmill beating the air almost on the very border of his splendid gardens. Then Frederic the Great did what Ahab did in this Bible-story. He tried to buy the mill. And the miller answered almost exactly as Naboth answered. The king raised his offer again and again, and ended by getting angry. The miller met the royal threats by an appeal to the court judges in Berlin. The judges supported him against the king; the mill went on grinding its corn; and to this day its great fans are whirled by every passing breeze.

The whole nation has come to regard the mill at Potsdam as a symbol of the peace and prosperity of the poor under



Prussian institutions. It has recently come into the possession of the royal family, but only with the proud consent, at last, of the descendants of the original owners. The world has got ahead. So far as concerns men who bear public rule and are subjected to the judgment of society, Ahabs must now be sought in darkest Africa or in equally benighted regions. Would that the spirit of Ahab were equally remote from all of us in our private lives and characters! Many of us, perhaps all, are too covetous, grasping, childish, weak in yielding to sin, even as was Israel's king.

1. We note, first, the course of temptation. It may seem to the casual reader that there was nothing wrong in Ahab's desire, or in the way in which he sought to gain it. So far as its terms were concerned, he proposed a strictly honorable bargain. The offer was even generous. Naboth might choose a better vineyard, or have cash. No hardship was involved except in respect to Naboth's principles and sentiments. But it was just here that the bargain failed, as it deserved to. That Naboth merely loved the place would have been enough. Objects of affection are often beyond price. He did not want either the money or a better vineyard. The reason for his declining the bargain was deeper.

Such a sale was an offence against the religious and statute law of Israel. It was carefully prescribed that inherited land should remain in the tribe where it was first owned. On this account a daughter to whom an inheritance fell was forbidden to marry outside her tribe. Her land must not pass to another tribe even by marriage. Within the same tribal limits the sale of real property was checked by many provisions. The theory was that the land all belonged to God, and that he had parcelled it out as he wished it to remain.

An owner might part with the use of his land for a time, even till the fiftieth or jubilee year: he might charge a high

price if the sale were made immediately after a jubilee, because then there would be many crops before the law would restore the land ; but if the sale were made near the close of the half-century, the price must be proportionately low, for the use of the land would be short. In any case what could be sold was the use only ; the land itself could not be alienated. You will find the statute in Leviticus xxv. and in the last chapter of Numbers. It is not wholly unlike the theory of land-tenure advocated in our day by Mr. Henry George.

Now the king must have known this law ; it is a stretch of charity to suppose that he did not. His proposal, therefore, showed a thorough lack of principle, a wicked contempt for the Mosaic Code. When the offer was refused by Naboth, Ahab knew that his subject was in the right. He therefore dropped the matter, and went home and moped like a fool. He went to bed ; he refused to eat. Then came his stronger wife. He was pitifully weak, — a mere child, a puppet in her hands.

Jezebel came of an unscrupulous stock. Her father, king of Zidon, had gained the throne by murdering his predecessor, Phales, who had himself risen to power by slaying his predecessor. The generation following Jezebel produced Pygmalion, who killed his brother-in-law, Sichæus, the husband of Dido, of whom Virgil speaks in the first book of the *Æneid*. We read the whole bloody story there, and in Josephus Against Apion, i. 18.

Jezebel was virtually ruler of the realm. She said, "Dost thou now govern the kingdom of Israel? . . . I will give thee the vineyard of Naboth." So Lady Macbeth drives her husband on to the murder of Duncan. She mocks his halting courage ; she provides suggestion and plan ; she does all except strike the murderous blow. She says to him at first, —

“ He that ’s coming  
Must be provided for ; and you shall put  
This night’s great business into my despatch.”

“ If we should fail,” objects Macbeth.

“ We fail !  
But screw your courage to the sticking place,  
And we ’ll not fail,”

she answers. And after it is done, and he refuses to return to put the evidence of guilt upon the sleeping and drugged servants, she exclaims, —

“ Infirm of purpose !  
Give me the daggers.”

Ahab is weaker than Macbeth, though not so wicked ; but Jezebel and Lady Macbeth are not far apart. When woman goes into crime, she often plunges to the extreme quicker than man. Jezebel said, “ I will give thee Naboth’s vineyard.” She laid her plot, and with every step of it, as Ahab did not spring to arrest her in it, Jezebel was bringing upon him more and more completely that curse which had begun to fall when he sought her in marriage. The first step in sin, little as it may impress us, is prophetic of all that follows.

The queen issued the warrant in Ahab’s name and sealed it with his seal. A solemn assembly was called. By false witnesses, men of Belial, — that is, worthless fellows, — Naboth was accused of blasphemy and sedition. He was judged guilty and stoned to death, and his sons with him. No one being left to inherit, the estates, as the property of an executed criminal, passed to the Crown.

Ahab had remained passive in the whole affair ; but when the queen said to him, “ Arise, take possession ; for Naboth is not alive, but dead,” he with childish eagerness ordered his chariot and rode to the place. What cared he how the new estate had been got ? His desire was gained ; he had the vineyard. Yes, and much more, — he had won for

himself a completed sin, a burden of guilt, a foreboding of conscience, a swift-coming doom.

There are few events in a man's life that stand alone. Every special sin has its long preparation. Probably the people that lived in Jezreel and Samaria often envied king Ahab. Samaria was his capital, Jezreel his neighboring country residence, — places related to each other very much as Berlin and Potsdam, London and Windsor, or Paris and Versailles. Was not Ahab a king, with palaces and gardens, chariots and gems, a wonderful ivory house in Samaria, a sumptuous court-life, unending pleasures, and more than all, this beautiful Zidonian princess for his wife? What if he did have faults? In a king some things must be overlooked. Men were surprised, doubtless, when he went to heathen Phoenicia for his bride; but then — he was a king; political alliances are often necessary. They looked on askance when they saw the long bridal train, with its hundreds of priests and priestesses of Baal and Astarte, coming up from the city by the sea. But of course Jezebel could not be expected to become an Israelitess all at once. Alas! the days went by and affairs became no better. Sin did not right itself. Ahab was more in the power of his queen at the end of a year than at first. Soon Baal instead of Jehovah ruled in Israel. The processes were gradual, but sure.

The avalanche in Switzerland rushes down at last; but what of the melting snows all through the spring and summer, until every water-drop has done its work and washed away the last pebble that supported the hanging mass of earth and ice? The lightning-flash is sudden; but what of the hidden electric forces that have been gathering in the atmosphere all through the heated months, so that at last the bolt must leap from the cloud to meet the discharge from the earth?

So morally. Ahab started wrong, as he knew. It was

not a question of one sin, but of sin. He would have his Zidonian wife, though it meant Baal-worship. His good resolutions failed one by one. When at last he coveted the vineyard, his evil genius was at hand as ever, and he let her go on to the end of the transaction. Through years he had been laying the fatal train that was to shatter his kingdom and seal his doom.

Who can tell just what moment of an evil course will bring the sinner to his abyss? After the first step every step is a peril. Even quiet consent, passive yielding, is fatal. The only safety is in prompt, manly, uncompromising conversion, — turning away from sin forever.

2. This brings us to the thought of God's patience. Ahab's rebellion had been long and obstinate: an alien marriage; adopted idolatry; persecutions for conscience' sake; open disobedience in war; and now covetousness, leading him to break the most sacred obligations and add robbery and murder to the list of his crimes. He had had many warnings from God. This triple crime of impiety, robbery, and murder settled the matter. God's word comes to Elijah, and Elijah comes to Ahab, — in the vineyard so ill-gotten. The prophet appears suddenly, but the king speaks first. Ahab in his vineyard does not seem to have been surprised by Elijah. He anticipated evil, as the sinner always does. Adam and Eve in their garden expected to hear the voice of their Judge. "Hast thou found me, O mine enemy?" Ahab said. He knew that he should be found. His conscience had found him long before. God is never far behind conscience. Elijah answered, "I have found thee: because thou hast sold thyself to do that which is evil in the sight of the Lord."

Ahab had bought a vineyard, and sold himself. He was more of a land-owner, less of a man. He was like many a man to-day, who will stretch the truth, offer or take a bribe,

cheat in a trade, gain some advantage at the expense of honor and faith, forgetful that the real and lasting fortune is character, and that the main question is not what a man has, but what a man is.

“Wealth and rule slip down with Fortune, as her wheel turns round ;  
He who keeps his faith, he only cannot be discrowned.  
Little were a change of station, loss of life or crown,  
But the wreck were past retrieving, if the Man fell down.”

The time had come for Ahab to receive a harder lesson than ever before. The prophet spoke Jehovah's decree, as Ahab's own signet had given authority to kill Naboth. As Naboth had died, so should Ahab die. As Naboth's family had been cut off, so should Ahab's race disappear. As Naboth's blood had been spilled outside the city, upon that very spot should the dogs lick up the blood of Ahab ; and there too should dogs eat Jezebel.

The awful curse brought him to his senses and to his knees. He rent his clothes, put sackcloth upon his flesh, fasted, lay in sackcloth, and went softly. It was not hypocrisy, it was a sort of repentance ; but it was a repentance only from fear, and hence wore off. The Spanish proverb is true : “When the river is passed, the saint is forgotten.” Yet so long as Ahab's soul was humbled, God would not smite him. He was granted a reprieve, and it was announced from heaven that his dynasty should not end with him, but later.

God is always patient. We sin ; he pleads and waits. We go on grasping after what is not our own : let *my* will, not thine, be done, is the prayer offered by every deed. God warns, instructs, shows us in a thousand ways that his will is right, and that it is in the very nature of things our destruction if we oppose it. He tempts us with every promise, and shows us the fair destiny awaiting those who love truth and are obedient

to him. At last some evil comes to us from our wrongdoing, and we are unfeignedly sorry; but it is more the sorrow of a frightened than of a truly penitent soul. But the divine heart is yet patient. The story of God's patience with Ahab is wonderful, but it is the story of his patience with most of us. We, too, are covetous to the last degree. *My* comfort, *my* pleasure, *my* wealth, *my* home, *my* loves, *my* will, — all these will I have, though at the expense of every other man's comfort, pleasure, wealth, home, loves, and will. And to this desperate covetousness of ours God matches his infinite self-sacrifice. Day after day he allows his will to be contravened, his love to be set at nought, his rightful possessions to be stolen from him, for the sake of the sinner. God delays. This fact was such a wonder even to thoughtful heathen that Plutarch wrote a treatise upon the subject, "The Delay of the Deity in punishing the Wicked." But to us God's delay is magnified and rendered more wonderful by what we know of Jesus Christ. Patience is the handmaid of forgiveness; it waits upon the sinner's hearty repentance and acceptance of Christ.

3. Thirdly, we have to note the significant fact that the curse upon Ahab fell at last. Sin must meet its doom. Brief and selfish repentance is not enough. If sin is not slain, it will slay. God's patience after all has its conditions. Years pass by, Ahab still living. At last he undertakes a war, and is slain in battle. They drove his bloody chariot home, with his dead body, and gave him burial. When they washed the chariot at the pool, dogs licked up the blood-stains, and in the reddened water harlots bathed. This was an awful, a polluting thing; the people saw and talked of it; their historians recorded it; and it was remembered as a fulfilment of the curse spoken by the man of God a dozen years before.



Then came Jezebel's fate. The conqueror appeared before her gates. Jezebel to the last, she "tired her head," smeared her eyebrows with antimony, and thus decked out courted death by throwing wide her lattice and taunting the victor as he approached. Looking up, he gave a quick command. Jezebel's own servants seized her and hurled her from the window. The lash fell on Jehu's chariot-horses. They plunged forward over her body and trampled her down, her blood spurting over them and upon the walls of the palace. As Jehu went in and sat down to his feast, the dogs of the city fed on Jezebel's flesh. God's word had come to pass; it always comes to pass.

Whether soon or late, the soul that sinneth it shall die. It stands written that though the heavens pass away, the word of the Lord shall not pass away. It is the final verdict: "He that seeketh his life shall lose it." The old question, "What will a man give in exchange for his life?" was answered: "Naboth's vineyard is the price for such as Ahab and Jezebel." "I will give ten years of my life to business alone; after that, religion," some other man is saying. "I will wait one year, and then obey God," some young person reflects. Remember that if you yourself set such a price on one year, or one decade of your life, you may end in selling the whole of life at the same rate. If you do that, remember also that God's word will be kept at the last.

4. What of Naboth and his sons? They were good men, so far as we are told, yet they died miserably. They were victims of injustice and cruelty, their very piety hastening their end and making them martyrs. Are we to conclude from this that what we have said concerning the doom of sin is untrue? Shall we draw the inference that the good and the bad are treated alike, so that there is no profit in godliness? It would be unfortunate to turn away from our lesson with this question unanswered.



Disasters come even to the best men; but Jesus bids us not to infer that a man is wicked merely from what happens to him. A tower in Siloam fell and crushed the passers-by. The Great Teacher said that it was not to be regarded as a judgment upon them for their sins. He taught that we cannot judge in this way at all. But it is very different if God says that a certain thing shall happen as a punishment, a just retribution, and then it does happen exactly as was foretold. In that case we have no alternative, but must regard it as punishment. If God says, by a law of nature, that fire will burn, I must consider burning a just retribution upon me if I wilfully put my hand in the flame. But if I am hurled into the flame by accident or by an enemy, it is no punishment. Ahab might have been finally slain in war, and without the special word of the Lord we could not have declared it a retribution from God. On the other hand Naboth might have lived and died peacefully, and we could not have determined merely from this circumstance that he was righteous. Naboth's fate was like that of all "the noble army of martyrs" who have died for the truth; he was stoned to death. So was Saint Stephen. Saint James was killed with the sword. Saint Paul was beheaded at Rome. Polycarp was burned. So untold hosts have died for their faith. Each suffered an awful death, yet joyfully and triumphantly. There was not a human torch that burned in the gardens of Nero that July evening in the year 64 who was not more blessed than the living emperor himself as he drove among them in his chariot. You can never tell from the mere observation of what befalls a man whether he is good or bad. But if God says, This shall be his doom, or This shall be his reward, then when the event comes we know that God's word has been fulfilled.

## Lesson VII. February 15.

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### ELIJAH TAKEN TO HEAVEN. •

*2 Kings ii: 1-11.*

BY REV. NATHAN E. WOOD, D. D., BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE strange vicissitudes of a human life, our kinship with them is so close, are always the most picturesque as well as the most fascinating history. They are, with variations, every man's autobiography. One cannot read personal history coldly. It always begets in us a kind of heat, — the glow of interest, of sympathy, and finally of fellowship. The Old Testament is not wanting in the lucid statement of great truths and principles, but it lives best in its glowing and realistic biographies. Inspired writers do not portray unreal and impossible lives. The lights and the shadows in each picture are faithfully depicted. The humanness of their sayings and doings is never omitted; they are real men and women.

Elijah, the greatest of the prophets, walks before us as a man most sensitively and keenly alive to every human interest and sympathy. He has left us almost nothing of utterance, but almost everything of life. Isaiah lives by his words, — poetic, majestic, prophetic; Elijah, by his deeds, — fierce, courageous, righteous. Quickly, again and again, he passes through the whole range of human emotions. Now he is in the exultation of triumph, again in the gloom of despair, and there is scarcely "a day's journey" between. The fiery temper, the fierce zeal, the swift

action, the hot, hissing words of denunciation, the imperious arraignment of king and court before the tribunal of the righteous Jehovah, are set over against great depression of spirit, querulousness of complaint, and, at times, despair of the triumph of righteousness among an idolatry-loving people. His was a wild, rugged, terrifying appearance, the dread of whose presence has not even yet passed away from the Orient. "Elijah comes!" is still a phrase with which to excite apprehension. The long hair, the shaggy, sheep-skin garment, the sudden, unexpected appearances of this man of the desert, and the awful energy of his words, left a vivid impression upon all Israel and upon all time. His fidelity had never failed; he had remained steadfast in his service to Jehovah. Again and again in the crises of Israel's history had he come forth to confront the powerful house of Ahab, with its inspiring demon, the bloody Jezebel. Feared, dreaded, hated in Ahab's court, he had been the voice of Jehovah speaking in the midst of a dark and idolatrous time. Among the faithless, he almost alone was faithful.

Elijah's great triumph was now at hand. He had been pursued, persecuted, baffled, homeless, a wanderer in deserts. His day had been stormy, wild, and dark, with here and there flashes of light and triumph through the riven clouds. But at the eventide there was to be light, — a very majesty of noontide splendor. God was to give him a wonderful escort into the gates of the Celestial City. As he goes by divine command from Gilgal to Bethel, Elisha is with him. With modest humility, Elijah bids his loved companion to tarry, for he is too great to seem in any way to boast of the triumph of his departure. A great life, like Elijah's, does not need witnesses to testify to its greatness or its goodness. But Elisha will not leave him.

## A GREAT FRIENDSHIP.

Elisha's decisive words, "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee," are the sign of that strong friendship which had grown up between these two men of God. Every extraordinary nature must needs have friendships to correspond, else its deeper life will remain untouched. It is a positive danger to have only little friendships, to touch other men only in the way of small fellowship. It indicates either that the man is selfish, unwilling to let his fellows into his life to share whatever of wealth it may possess, or that he is so unlovely and repulsive that no one is willing to share a life so forbidding. A selfish heart is always the secret brooding-place of every evil; but whenever a man throws open the doors of his being for great, warm, living friendships, receiving his friends with cordial hospitality, giving them the best of his wealth, bidding them sit as the perpetual guests at his table, and generously sharing with them whatever refreshes his own soul, that man cannot grow selfish, for a selfish life is always small and inhospitable. It will not nurse large friendships, because it cannot.

Elijah was essentially a solitary man. His peculiar temperament, as well as his mission, intensified this isolation. His fierce words seemed to indicate a nature that must be forbidding to the sensitive overtures of any deep friendship. But it was not so. The greatness of his soul and the integrity of his heart made friendship welcome and even necessary. Are not men known by the friends whom they make and keep? Are not these the indexes of the man's real selfhood? Elijah without his close friend, Elisha, would not have been so great. We should have felt less certain of the purity and nobility of the great prophet if the strong friendship of these two had not certified them. How many hearts

have been thrilled by that sweet story of Ruth and Naomi, recounting the gentle ministries of their mutual love! The whole world of womanhood has been blessed by that simple tale of unselfish womanliness. In like manner strong, manly, mutual love adorns the lives of these two great prophets. It was a friendship of love grown strong in a common service of holy living, in similar lofty aims of righteousness, and in their one divine calling. There is no friendship so rich or true as that nurtured in the atmosphere of which God is the life. And so, in holy companionship, the twain went on from Gilgal to Bethel, from Bethel to Jericho, and from Jericho to the very gates of Paradise. Worthy is the friendship which looks Paradise-ward. Chariots and horses of fire, with all manner of celestial splendors, lie along such pathways.

#### A GREAT SCHOOL.

As Elijah and Elisha go down the slopes of the Jordan interesting on-lookers appear. The sons of the prophets come forth from their schools with eager interest to witness the close of Elijah's eventful life. They had doubtless often heard his words. He had been their revered teacher in the Holy Scriptures; for in these schools nothing took precedence of the Sacred Book. All wisdom and light were found in it, and in it they studied daily. A Hebrew school without the Bible would have seemed a monstrosity. At home as well as in school, from childhood to majority, the Hebrew youth were taught the law and the prophets. Not merely the Jews' Sabbath-day school of formal worship, but their week-day schools as well, inculcated the Word of God. In the schools of the prophets, even though the court and nation gave themselves over to idolatry, that Word was kept living and pure. Here Jehovah was revered and worshipped; for the instruction was maintained, not merely to

perpetuate the prophetic office and to provide for it men who should be well trained, but also to give any Hebrew youth who might attend, a thorough knowledge of the inspired words of Jehovah.

Such were the youth who reverently stood afar off to behold the mighty prophet of the Lord exchange earth for heaven. It is always the fore-court of heaven where Christian men gather about the bed of a Christian whose "time of departure is at hand." It is a foretaste of the heavenly society. Wickedness is never comforting in the presence of death. The righteous God and his faithful children are the only companions whose society gives light when the shadows begin to deepen toward the valley of death. It is a notable close of a godly life when dear spiritual friends, when a chosen company of saintly men, stand with serene face to witness the triumphant departure. Jericho, Jordan, and the hills of Gilead were witnesses to such a wonderful scene that day.

The young men from the schools of the prophets may perhaps not have read that luminous lesson aright. The real glory of that scene was not "the chariots and horses of fire," but the lesson it conveyed that God honors and cares for his faithful servants, and that the favor of God is always infinitely better than the favor of kings. As they that day looked across to the far Gilead hills, they might read written on that rugged landscape many lessons of Hebrew history. There Jacob had wrestled with the Angel of the Lord at Peniel. There, on Nebo, had stood Moses to take his first and his last look on the Land of Promise. Thither had come the hosts of Israel under Joshua, to pass through the Jordan dry-shod. Thither king David had fled, uncrowned, when pursued by the unfilial Absalom. Every one of these lessons emphasized the loving mercy and care of Jehovah. If these sons of the prophets could

have read prophecy as they read history, they would have seen standing there in the Jordan, against the background of Gilead, a Man kinglier than all others, a Prophet greater than Elijah, even Jesus, the Redeemer of the world. It was a unique school-room, rich in divine lessons, wherein these students stood on the hills of Jericho as they waited and watched for the translation of Elijah.

#### A GREAT MIRACLE.

The two prophets came to the brink of the Jordan. Once, long ago, had those fluent waters stood still at the word of divine power to let all Israel pass through on dry ground from the wilderness to Canaan, from weary hope to assured possession. Now again does a pilgrim stand there, with life and its wilderness behind him, the land of promise before him, and only this Jordan "rolling darkly between." Will it part again and let the waiting pilgrim through? These Jordans always part when God accompanies a traveller from earth to heaven; and be the waters never so dark or raging, God's friends shall pass through them dry-shod and triumphant.

Elijah had well learned the lesson of the divine power over nature. At his word in the great trial on Carmel, fire had come down from heaven in the presence of assembled Israel and consumed the altar with its sacrifice. The rain had been his willing minister. The heavens had been closed and opened again by his prayer. He had miraculously multiplied "the barrel of meal and the cruse of oil." The ravens had provided him with food. He had stood on Horeb when the wind and the earthquake had shown their terrific power; but the "still small voice" had taught him that God was greater than all these, and that physical forces were but servitors of the divine will. So now these turbid Jordan waters shall not be able to stay the pass-



ing of a divinely guarded soul from the Old Canaan to the New. The waters smitten by the mantle of Elijah obey, and stand parted while the two prophets pass through. It was the last of Elijah's great miracles, but its lesson could not be lost. The God of the parted Jordan, who had centuries before led all Israel through, had not forsaken or forgotten his people. Then, now, and forever he stands ready to lead his friends through the Jordan which separates earth from heaven. The divine love, and the divine power to help, do not lessen or grow faint as the godly soul nears the chilly stream. Having loved his own who are in the world, God loves them even to the end.

#### A GREAT BLESSING.

The final scene is at hand. Elisha, sadly certain of his near-impending loss, begs as a final request that the spirit of Elijah may rest on him in double measure. He knew that no man could fill the great prophet's place, and that he himself, to whom all men would look, would fail in the prophetic office without the blessing of double grace. He was unlike Elijah. His work was to be close intermingling with men in society and court. He could not expect to add to his words any weird power by sudden apparitions out of the wilderness. His aspect was not awesome or fear-compelling. His character was not rugged and towering, like the wild Horeb rocks. He was to do among all classes of men the plain, daily tasks of a teacher and prophet. He was to be a daily resident in human society. His were the more common work-a-day tasks of life.

To do common duties in a noble, unselfish, godly way always requires double grace. It is comparatively easy to perform great and conspicuous work in a large way. So many eyes are watching, one scarcely dares act otherwise than in a noble spirit. A mean act in a great service somehow mocks a man, stings him, shames him. The incon-



gruity is a continual scourge to his feelings. But in the minor services of life, in the home, in society, and in his daily tasks, he will do a thousand small deeds of meanness with but little pain or shame. Was it not this which made our Master say to us, "Whosoever shall give to drink unto one of these little ones a cup of cold water only, in the name of a disciple, shall in no wise lose his reward"? Many disciples are ready to endure martyrdom: fewer are ready to carry cups of cold water. Every man needs double grace for minor service. Never fear but that he will do the few great acts of his life in a large way, but fear much lest he shall do its ten thousand little deeds in a small, mean way.

Elisha prays to inherit Elijah's good spirit. No man ever yet asked to inherit other people's wickedness. Many build that kind of a fortune for themselves, but what man is there who wishes to be heir to it? The wickedest of men do not care to entail their wickedness upon their sons. Not the faults, the failures, or the sins of Elijah did Elisha pray to inherit, but his spirit of obedience, of close fellowship with God, of power to do the work of righteousness. He wished to receive Elijah's spirit of "other-worldliness." Whatever of goodness or godliness any man may have, he would like to transmit it, and his heirs would like to inherit it. Who would not count himself fortunate to receive a double portion of a good man's spirit? But the getting of such a spirit always has coupled with it a condition. "Thou hast asked a hard thing," said Elijah: "if thou see me when I am taken from thee, it shall be so unto thee; but if not, it shall not be." The condition then as now is, watching, serving, and waiting; and if this condition be fulfilled, other men also may receive from Elijah's God, in double and even treble portions if they need, Elijah's excellent spirit.

## THE GREAT TRANSLATION.

"As they still went on and talked," — surely the conversation must have been heavenly, — "the chariots of fire and the horses of fire" came swiftly down and bore Elijah away. The prophet who had followed the paths of the wilderness alone, who had come a wanderer and hungry to the gate of Zarephath, who had walked, dusty and weary, every road in the kingdom, who had run swifter than Ahab's chariots from Carmel "to the entrance of Jezreel," is at last borne along life's highways in chariots of fire, surrounded by angelic throngs. There is no more "weariness of life," hunger, or persecution. It is his time of triumph. The wicked Ahab, who had hunted him "as a partridge upon the mountains," was defeated and dead, and the very "dogs had licked his blood by the pool of Samaria," where his victim, Naboth, had been stoned to death. The fierce, relentless, heathenish Jezebel was soon to lie mangled by the wall of Jezreel, and the dogs were to eat her flesh there. Ahab and Jezebel, in the splendor and power of royalty, haters of righteousness, with seeming ability to gratify every desire, courted and applauded, called great by the world, but now the portion of dogs; Elijah, hunted, hated, loving righteousness, speeding his swift way heavenward in the chariots of God, — such are "the reversals of human judgments."

God's saints may be led through many a wilderness, wherein lie more defeats than victories. Carmel with its splendid triumph may be followed by persecution and despair, "under the juniper tree, a day's journey from Beer-sheba;" but the final outcome of righteousness will always be the escort of heaven and the crown of rejoicing. No man may know all the divine plan for a human life which has made God its centre; no man may understand its strange vicissitudes. God has made that his own secret. But the

outcome of it all he has published upon the very heavens. Elijah and the chariots of fire are forever an object-lesson written luminously for all men to read. A godly life cannot suffer final defeat. Triumphant righteousness in heaven and struggling righteousness in the earth are inseparably joined, and at the right time the one will despatch its "chariots of fire" to bring the other to its home in glory. When God sends to take his faithful servants home from earth to heaven, it is not a time for fear, but for triumph. Just beyond the passage of the turbid Jordan are the waiting messengers of God to bear them to the Golden Gate.

Sacred history offers of Elijah but one more glimpse. More than a thousand years later he stands in glory beside the suffering Son of Man approaching his passion. It is upon one of his own favorite mountain-summits. He is talking with the Christ. Of what? The answer is interesting. As when parted from Elisha so long ago upon the hills of Gilead, he still discourses upon the wonders of God's goodness, care, and plans. These themes have not grown old with him "in glory," but they still occupy his thought and furnish the matter of his conversation. He is still upon the errands of Jehovah,—the glad messenger of the heavenly will. He is come to talk with Christ upon "the decease which he should accomplish at Jerusalem," and the glory which should follow. Did his speech have added fervor and power from the vivid memories of a thousand years before, when he passed through the portals of glory in the chariots of fire? Living, conscious, blessed, eagerly busy yet upon the Almighty's missions, talking ever of the divine goodness and glory,—such is our last glimpse of Elijah a thousand years after he has passed into the heavens.

## Lesson VIII. February 22.

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### ELIJAH'S SUCCESSOR.

*2 Kings ii: 12-22.*

By REV. J. L. CHENEY, PH. D., YPSILANTI, MICH.

#### I. THE BEREAVEMENT: *Elisha mourning for the spirit-taught Elijah.*

“MY father, my father!” through the wilderness solitude resounded the bitter cry. It was the lament of orphanhood, the wail of the mourner, such as Egypt once heard over her dead first-born. For an instant the overwhelming sense of personal loss has burst in upon the heart. Called out from the field like the prophet Amos, Elisha, the young farmer, had at the word of the Tishbite left his plough to serve him as a son serves a father. Stronger even than the ties of nature were the bonds that held the young learner to the revered master. How tenderly the Apostle Paul used to write, “My beloved son Timothy.” How beautiful the relationship between many a teacher or preacher and the earnest learner who like Elisha counts it his highest honor to “pour water on the hands” of such an older guide!

With the sad wail was joined the outward demonstration. So Jacob rent his clothes when the bloody coat revealed the fate of his Joseph. So did Job's friends, in token of their deep sorrow. Shrewd Jews sometimes estimated skilfully how much the clothes would be injured by this rite. With Elisha there was no calculation; the garments were rent

from top to bottom. It was not for his great heart to repress or to conceal his grief. In seeking to honor him who said, "I am the resurrection and the life," some, in burying their dead, reject all tokens of grief, flooding instead the death-chamber with bright light, and decking the house with garlands. But who spoke the words, "Blessed are they that mourn"? Is it not written that "Jesus wept" in presence of death? Elisha's bitter lamentation and rent clothes unite to sanction our sorrow even when God takes our loved ones as his own to heaven.

"My father!" Elisha had discovered in his preceptor the loving father-heart. But for this almost unconscious testimony, we should be nearly certain to have a one-sided view of Elijah. President John Quincy Adams, a tiger in debate, is commonly pictured as among the fighting politicians of American history. How corrective of this to contemplate him even to old age kneeling every night to repeat the prayer he learned at his mother's knee,—"Now I lay me down to sleep."! The usual thought of Elijah makes him simply "the prophet of fire," "the greatest and sternest of Hebrew prophets." He whose very name, "My God is Jehovah," utters a stout protest against idolatry, appears most often as the messenger of wrath, hurling curses against the ungodly king, the wicked Jezebel, and her Baal-worship.

Elisha reveals the other side of his character. Though, like Melchizedek, bursting in upon the record with no detailed genealogy, "without father and without mother," Elijah, the houseless, homeless prophet, was a man "of like passions with us." The gospels reveal only his gentler deeds,—blessing the widow of Sarepta, turning the heart of the fathers to the children, restoring all things. The only apparent exception, Luke ix. 54, the Revised Version omits. All honor to Elisha that he had learned thus to appreciate the grand old prophet! How often an aged saint would be

greatly comforted if he only knew that some one cared for him! Hush, be still! the young prophet mourns his prophet parent. All the happy hours, all the glad experiences, all the hallowed bliss of the seven years' guardianship, his memory brings back. Thronging through his heart, these tender memories overwhelm him. In the agony of this separation the world gains an entrancing glimpse of prophet and pupil, each great-hearted.

"The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." The range of thought widens. Beyond his own personal loss Elisha mourns that of the people. Chariots and horses, once forbidden, had become the most effective arms in Israel's military service; yet better than those was the presence of the great Gileadite. Mightier than serried hosts, more powerful than whirling chariots, — the heavy artillery of that age, — more valiant than bravest cavalry, stronger than any army, was Elijah in Elisha's eyes.

Nor was this an exaggeration. Recount what Elijah had done for his nation. See him crushing out its greatest enemy, idolatry. Sharp in discerning evil, he was no less stern in putting it away, in denouncing sin and announcing God's will. Leader and inspiration of Jehovah's worshippers, Elijah had indeed been a mighty power, Israel's surest defence. Wherein? In that the people through him had been to so goodly an extent kept in fellowship with God. What did that signify? Remember Sodom. Long as one righteous lingered, destruction waited. "Haste thee, escape thither; for I cannot do anything till thou be come thither." So the fate of the battle at Rephidim turned on one man, Moses. So Israel was saved at Ebenezer by one man, Samuel. Over the death-bed of Elisha himself those same sublime words are repeated by his king: "The chariot of Israel and the horsemen thereof." Truly, "wisdom is better than strength," and righteousness

exalteth a nation. How widely Elijah differs from Washington, yet in neither life would the career have been possible without the character. Both stand for inflexible integrity, for power in righteousness; the armies of a great nation retreated before each; through each the course of history was signally changed. Not by might nor by power, but by the God-fearing spirit did these leaders accomplish their noble work.

## II. THE BEQUEST: *Elisha receiving the Spirit.*

"Be still, and know that I am God." This at first thought might have seemed to be God's will touching Elisha. Not so. After his transfiguration, duty calls Jesus down from the mount to heal the lunatic. After the ascension, disciples may not stand gazing up into heaven, but must hasten back from Olivet to receive at Jerusalem the promised Spirit. Even so the young farmer-prophet, rapt and dazed though he is, may not linger at the scene of his master's translation.

Just before him was the sheep-skin mantle. Falling from the prophet as he went upward, it came to Elisha as a cherished relic. Years before, it had been laid upon him when ploughing. For the last seven years how often he had seen it! Now, as at first, it was a call to service. More than a relic, it was a symbol. Aaron's garments were put upon his son at Mount Hor, Moses thus recognizing the transfer of the high-priesthood to the younger man. In all spheres the falling mantle has become a synonyme for the transfer both of honor and of unfinished work bequeathed to a chosen successor. Nor was Elisha slow to seize the gift. For it he was watching. With eyes strained to see all that mortal vision could, he had been peering upward, fearful lest he lose aught that Elijah's promise had contained.



Like Solomon, Elisha had made a supreme choice. What he sought was promised him on one condition. He had tried to fulfil this; would he gain the blessing? Like Moses, like Ezekiel, like Daniel, Elisha had with eyes "opened" seen the blinding, majestic, mysterious vision of the Divine Glory. Wonderful privilege, to view the pomp in which God takes his beloved to his home! Around the dying Christian's face are occasionally caught rare glimpses of the inflooding glory. Elisha had seen much. Had he seen all? God had taken the master. This much Elisha knew; but whither? In the early dawn of the day of grace it was not given saints to know the fulness of the apostles' revelation concerning heaven. Where was Elijah now? The rabbis, later, taught that Elijah had been carried to the Garden of Eden, whence he would come again in Israel's sorest need. Could Elisha be sure of aught like this? Would his last prayer be granted? The mantle brings blessed and sufficient answer; it tells him that his title is clear. Though walking back to the Jordan with only a memory and a mantle, he knows that the eldest son's double inheritance is his; he is Elijah's chosen successor.

He reaches the river with Elijah's last miracle fresh in his memory. What can the new prophet do in face of these waters? It is the one opportunity of a lifetime to use the old mantle. Never again will it be of service. The fateful moment sees the opportunity improved. Like Moses with his rod, like Elijah with this same garment, Elisha wraps the mantle together, smites the waters, and appeals to Jehovah. Where is Elijah? had been a great question. Now a greater arises: Where is the Lord God of Elijah? This was no word of doubt, as we see in the prophet Jeremiah's complaints because the priests of his day omit it. It was the cry of faith, firm and vivid because of the divine



vision. "Manifest thyself, O Jehovah! Thou hast taken Elijah: bless me. Help, Lord, for the godly man ceaseth!" Solemnly he advances into the Jordan. Thrilling must have been the scene as the lone prophet walked steadily through the new-made path. And behold, that Lord who kept Moses and Joshua, and who said through Isaiah, "When thou passest through the waters, I will be with thee," responds to the appeal. The mantle is his, and at its touch the waters recede. Yes, Elisha has inherited the longed-for Spirit. He is as Elijah had been, a representative on earth of the Divine Majesty.

How often the timid beginner in Sunday-school or pulpit work has asked earnestly, "Where is the Lord God of the fathers?" And when such young servant of God has been enabled to lead happy converts to the cross, or has learned by other plain token how difficulties recede and God honors faith, overwhelming joy has put new and rich meaning into the promise, "Verily, verily, I say unto you, he that believeth on me, the works that I do shall he do also."

The sons of the prophets, who "stood to view," were no careless observers. As they see Elisha repeating Elijah's miracle, the chorus unites to declare, "The spirit of Elijah doth rest on Elisha." Mendelssohn's grand oratorio vividly depicts this greeting. It is as if Jehovah were presenting his new ambassador: "Behold, my servant, mine elect, in whom my soul delighteth. On him the spirit of God shall rest, the spirit of wisdom and understanding, the spirit of counsel and might, the spirit of knowledge and of the fear of the Lord." High honor had come to those sons of the prophets! It was a great token of his regard when God took of the spirit that was upon Moses and gave it to the seventy elders. Honor comes to any class or congregation when the Almighty puts his Spirit upon one of the number. Happy if the members can discern the heavenly gift! "He

that receiveth a prophet in the name of a prophet shall receive a prophet's reward."

Watch these students. They bow in devout reverence. They worship not the mantle, not the miracle. It is no relic-worship, no hero-worship. They see that God's power rests upon Elisha. Would that observers might discover this in every professor of religion! Nothing more quickly evokes the respect of associates. Fear not the decline of power in the ministry or the Church so long as the Spirit rests visibly on those baptized and ordained. The mantle of Elijah without "the double portion" is only a meaningless relic. The succession without the Spirit is but an empty honor.

### III. THE BEGINNING: *Elisha, the Spirit-taught, teaching and healing.*

Thus highly blessed, Elisha begins his public career. His record occupies a larger space in the sacred narrative than is given to that of any other prophet. These closing verses of our lesson present a brief epitome of his sixty years' activity. Once the prophet is approached for counsel: he gives it, only to be unheeded. Again he is approached for deliverance from a painful form of temporal need: he heeds the cry and purifies the spring of water.

"Let us go and seek the master" was not so strange a request. Remember, the young men had not gathered at any death-bed of Elijah. Was he indeed dead? Obadiah reminds us how the Spirit used to carry the prophet hither and thither. Elisha had seen his mysterious departure. The students had not, and for satisfactory reasons he would not tell them of it. Moreover, could it be that the young Elisha was to carry on the work of the missing prophet? Notice the contrast: the old man, tall, gaunt, long-haired, severely stern; his young successor so different in all these traits!

Elijah had been "the prophet of solitude," dwelling in desert and cave; Elisha is "the prophet of society," winsome, companionable, beloved of princes and of peasants. No wonder that the students desired to search for the missing Elijah. That Elisha vetoes this might have seemed sufficient to end the matter, were it not that young human nature is constantly refusing good advice. "Don't drift into those amusements, my son," said a wise New England father; "you lose, not gain. I know, for I've had experience." "Just so," stubbornly replied the son; "but I want the experience for myself." Against Elisha's plain-spoken advice, they urged their plea. Perplexed, embarrassed, feeling that his attitude might give rise to ill-natured suspicion, he yielded. No Elijah reverts the search. Fifty "sons of strength" could ransack every corner of this little district. But God had shut the door of the heavens; Elijah was beyond their ken. Returning weary and wiser, they had learned that the successor had claims upon their respect.

Elisha has left the desert and settled in the city. His rank is already recognized. Jericho, recently rebuilt, spite of Joshua's curse, is "pleasant for situation," "rising like an oasis from a broad plain of sand." Yet any city where "the water is nought" is always in danger. The rulers ask Elisha's help.

Recall Elijah's first miracle. A poor, insignificant stranger, appearing like a flash, a defiant messenger of wrath, he was facing King Ahab and exclaiming, "No rain but at my word!" When the men of Jericho present to Elisha their courteous petition, "Behold, we beseech thee, our crying need!" they expect as an answer, not a curse and a drought, but blessing and deliverance. Were they not impressed by the same Divine Spirit that led the rulers at Cana's feast to seek for help from him the beginning of whose miracles would be also a changing of water?

"Bring a new saucer and put salt therein." To sow the land with salt was a token of utter ruin. The salted land was a land accursed. The law, however, reads clearly: "With all thine offerings thou shalt offer salt." That remarkable passage, Mark ix. 49, gives to this our Lord's sanction: "Salt is good." The salt poured on the new, round, metallic saucer is the emblem of purity, — the quality which the waters of Jericho lacked. "Thus saith the Lord, I have healed these waters." Whose, then, is the glory? Does Elisha yield to the temptation that overcame Moses? Does he magnify his own share in bringing deliverance from drought? Worthy of his name, "My God is deliverance," is the unassuming benefactor. Is it not significant that he inaugurated his benign career by cleansing a spring? Type of the skilful religious teacher, he appreciated the lasting value of beginning at the source. Travellers around the ruins of Jericho find "Elisha's Fountain" still pleasant to the taste. Blessed are all they who in God's name cast the salt of grace into the springs of men's action. Such deserve grateful praise. Yet how often do they forget to copy Elisha when he ascribes all the glory to the Lord.

Thus the successor begins. Students and citizens learn, with Elisha himself, that when God takes one worker, the mantle falls upon another. So it is ever. Just a century ago died James Manning. He was first president of the first "school of the prophets" among American Baptists. His successor, Jonathan Maxcy, was one of his students, whom he had baptized. Maxcy in turn baptized his successor, President Messer. Through the century God has raised up teacher after teacher, — Wayland, Anderson, Dodge, and many others, — to assume the mantle and let it fall in time on younger colleagues, whose honored privilege it became to put salt in the springs, so scattering God's bounteous blessings among great communities and over the earth.

The new is never the exact copy of the old. The mould in which Elijah was fashioned God breaks, never to remake. John the Baptist, even, will not be like Elijah in all points. In Elisha men will see a surprising contrast to his predecessor. Yet with all the diversities of gifts there is always in men like these one spirit.

The six sayings which follow may help as indexes to sum up the lesson. The prophet Elisha is found (1) deploring the loss of Elijah, (2) imploring the presence of Jehovah. The students worship (3) and distrust (4); alas for frail, fickle humanity! The city appeals to Elisha (5), and is delivered from drought (6). In the bereavement Elisha mourns for the Spirit-taught; in the bequest he gains the Spirit; in the beginning of his career he gives counsel and deliverance.

In the whole lesson the teaching of the Golden Text comes before us more clearly than it could ever have been presented to the prophet Zechariah. Mightier than any army of Israel or host of Baal was the lone Tishbite; power over Nature and among men was wielded in extraordinary degree by the son of Shaphat. Yet for Elijah and Elisha both, success was possible only by the Divine Spirit. That Spirit God is ever ready to give us; for that Spirit we are encouraged always to pray.

## Lesson IX. March 1.

### THE SHUNAMMITE'S SON.

*2 Kings iv: 25-37.*

By REV. C. H. WATSON, ARLINGTON, MASS.

THE instantaneous picture flashed upon us by this scripture is that of a woman just approaching Mount Carmel in great haste, and under the stress of some recent calamity. She had often travelled the seventeen miles from Shunem, seeking prophetic teaching and religious worship; but the six hours necessary for the journey never seemed so long as now. It was not the leisure pilgrimage of the worshipper anticipative of blessing and peace. Something had made it sudden, urgent, definite. An alarm possessed her that would have sped her, with a swiftness impossible to horses, for help, not the help of worship or of the truth, but of a man,—the man of God, the prophet of Israel. When we are struck by sudden terror, we want not only the truth, but a true man,—the wonderful comfort of one nearer to God and stronger with him than you know yourself to be.

Who was the woman? What was her errand? How did it result?

She was the wife of an aged man of means, who lived in the village of Shunem, which lay on the road that the prophet Elisha took as he travelled from Samaria to Carmel. Our scripture calls her “a great woman,”—doubtless a phrase common in that day to describe a woman who had a wealthy and influential husband. The fine opportunity that a crisis

gives to study the character passing through it, will make us bold to call her "great" in a higher sense. There is nothing like a severe calamity to show the world who and what we are, and to whom and what we belong. But keen observers can always get intimations of our quality before the calamity comes. It is clear in the context what this woman was in herself. "Context," I say, to distinguish that part of the narrative that has been arbitrarily separated from the part called "the lesson." The entire account of the Shunammite and her son is a single leaf of Scripture, none of which can well be torn off.

Our impression that the woman is great, though rich, comes from her power to appreciate a great man and cultivate him, and the sagacious forms of gratitude that she showed for the privileges of his friendship. Such a woman would be quite certain to have an open eye for all best things, and prove her gratefulness for each one by wisely turning it to account. This woman had a finer discernment than her husband; but to his credit it must be said that he made a good second,—he recognized wisdom, though it came to his wife first, and helped to justify it by willingly becoming its child himself. She discovered the prophet; they both took him in. It was a simple process: the journeys to and fro of the man of God had become known to her. He had come in to eat bread as he passed. She had looked into his face, caught the tones of his voice, weighed some of his words, heard the praise of his works, and, womanlike, she says: That man is great in wisdom and goodness. I cannot know him without being wiser and better. He will bless my husband and my house. And when thought had grown into plan, she said, "Husband, behold now, I perceive that this is a holy man of God. . . . Let us make a little chamber on the wall . . . for him; and it shall be that when he cometh to us, he shall turn in thither."



There was deft appreciation of the prophet's thoughtful, prayerful life in the way that the room was built upon the roof, and the private stair connected with it, so that he might be conscious of no intrusion upon the family life, and they fear no disturbance of his own quiet hours. There were here the two elements of perfect hospitality. The prophet was sure that he was blessed by the family, and the family was equally certain of their blessing through the prophet, — surely a better condition than the social folly called "visiting," wherein one neither blesses nor is blessed, that rests on the mercenary level of *quid pro quo*; which, being freely translated for our present purpose, means, "If you dare to visit me, I'll visit you." High sense and fine tact spare the family that waste of spirit, and either seek good or do good through its hospitality.

Another evidence of the woman's uncommon character is her contentment, — a virtue as rare among rich and influential women as among the poor. Yea, rarer. The little that we have is reaching after the much that we have not; and the much that we have is hungering for all. But this Shunammite had a contentment that at first baffled a prophet's gratitude. We do not receive long without craving the greater luxury of giving. True gratitude magnifies a little service, and would make its own requital still greater. Thus Elisha's courtly message to the woman through Gehazi: "Behold, thou hast been careful for us with all this care; what is to be done for thee? wouldest thou be spoken for to the king, or to the captain of the host?" Her answer stamps her a woman, every inch: "I dwell among mine own people." I have all that I desire, and am contented with what I have. My circumstances and my people are my friends, and I am happy among them. The atmosphere of the man of God added to her love of husband; her enjoyment of her people and her duty to them filled her cup. No crim-



inal waste of herself in vain regrets, in repining, in straining after the impossible. She respected her life and filled herself full of it, and it full of herself.

What could the prophet do? How could he bless her? Such a question, put to a weak man by a strong one, sometimes causes the weakling to surprise himself and his friends with a strong and pertinent suggestion. So Gehazi spoke at once of her life's single great defect, — her barrenness. "Verily she hath no child." To the Oriental woman childlessness was the one desperate calamity. We shall have to keep on Oriental ground to appreciate the Shunammite's solemn caution to the prophet when he said, "Thou shalt embrace a son." "Nay, my lord, thou man of God, do not lie unto thine handmaid!" The blessing was so great, so unlikely, that her joy fluttered, and had no daring, hence merely expressed itself in impulsive warning against raising false expectations. But the man-child was born to her. Her arms, her heart, her home were full. With the passing years the child had grown deeper into her, and her reverence for the man of God had ripened into a perfect trust. But blessings are often only ways into woe. When this comes we would fain use for our comfort the one "whom we believe."

Such had her blessing become, and her errand to Elisha was the one comfort that hope held out to sorrow. She was in the depths, and out of the depths would she cry unto God through his prophet. Her little son and only child had, with that natural passion that makes boys so precious to their fathers, been reaching out into his father's active life, having on a hot harvest-day gone out with him into the fields among the reapers. The boy was prostrated with the heat; for the description points to an attack of sunstroke, where the first symptoms are violent pains in the head. The father, thinking lightly of it, merely tells his servant to carry the child home to his mother. The mother's love showed itself in her

unbroken attention. She held him upon her knees until noon, when he died.

True to her strong, resolute nature, she lost no time in fruitless lamentation, but all thought and action centred in "the man of God." She bore the little body up to the prophet's bed. She had lost her child, but not her faith. She parried her husband's questionings, and was soon speeding with the servant to Mount Carmel, to the prophet. Elisha sees her coming, and quick suspicion of trouble makes him feel deeply and act quickly. He cannot wait; her haste, the unusual time of the visit, the earnest manner, make him anxious to know before she gets near enough to tell. He hurries Gehazi to meet her with urgent questions. Gehazi only gets her favorite answer: "It is well." She knows Gehazi; she has no mood for him,—the one who would soon thrust her away as she clasps the feet of the man of God suppleting. Gehazi was not up to this matter. He was down among thoughts about his master's personal dignity. As if it were a time for such trifles as that! She and the prophet silence the servant and have their way,—she to overflow at last, the flood of pent-up grief issuing forth in that enigmatical form of reproach so Oriental: "Did I desire a son of my lord? Did I not say, do not deceive me?" he to hear the cry for help, to understand her grief, and to take swift measures to restore the child.

The results of her errand to Elisha begin now to appear. The man of God is impatient of delay, so deep is personal interest and feeling for mourner and child. Had she not earned his fast friendship by her greatness of character as wife, mother, woman? And had not the stern and earnest prophet found many an hour of tender delight in the fascinating fellowship of her little boy? Elisha had the gentleness of the great and strong. "The rock which on its seaward side stands abrupt, perpendicular, and bare, ready

to meet and repel all the assaults of the ocean, does on its landward side hold out its arms to the soil, and carries on its bosom the soft moss, the beautiful lichen, or the blooming flower." So the prophet of God who with coarse garb and shaggy visage stands before kings to rebuke them, finds that a little child has the master-key of trust, love, and wonder that opens his heart and leads him out. Thus it was doubtless the over-haste of love, and one of its mistakes, that prompted the despatching of Gehazi with the prophet's staff, and the nervous command to shun the elaborated Eastern salutation, too tedious for the man that must make haste. But the mother was not deceived. She did not hasten with the good staff and the bad man. She tarried with the good man without a staff, crying: "As the Lord liveth, and as thy soul liveth, I will not leave thee."

There is nothing so clairvoyant as that mood which the strain of trouble brings to a woman. She knows "what is in man" then, and her word and act are prophetic. Here it prophesied Gehazi's failure. The good man is the life-giving staff, and the bad man has only a stick,—*is* only a stick in the business of bringing the dead to life. In the unerring instinct of the Shunammite there is prophecy of Gehazi's perfidy in the matter of Naaman's release from leprosy and his own bondage to it, and in her unwavering faith in the power over death of the man of God there is prophecy of life from death.

Here is a result that is not local, but universal; a truth vindicated by the faith of the woman that needs vindication again and again. I mean the truth that goodness alone is power. She had that written upon her soul, and kept her eyes upon the writing. The staff with its miraculous history was nothing, separate from the good man's hand. The mantle of the prophet of God enfolding the wrong man would have been nothing. She was wonderfully clear in her practical theology. The line from her need to God's help

was faith's line, straight to God through the good man. She was not confused about goodness and power, keeping them apart or making them exclude one another.

We do well to sit at her feet here. It is the way out of death to life. Do we not often use the word "good" as a reproach, or as a synonyme of incapacity or weakness? Is not the man whom we characterize as "merely good" regarded as more dead than alive? Are we really mistaken, and is he not only alive but life-giving? Men of ability, shrewdness, cleverness, men who "get there," are covered with the modern medals of honor. Gehazi "got there" before Elisha; but Elisha was sorely needed when he arrived. Gehazi was abler in finance, shrewder at a bargain, more clever in shifting for himself, very supple in getting around. But there was more power in Elisha's little finger than in Gehazi's legs, loins, arms, and wits. Somehow, with all his ability, Gehazi, like many a modern, seemed rapidly striding to leprosy. And that is not power: it is death.

Goodness alone is power still. You cannot tell how much Elisha can lift until you know the secret of his strength. When you have understood his God, you will understand the man of God. Then you will come to some knowledge of those great currents that may be set in motion in the air and in the earth, in the coincidence of the forces of matter, mind, and spirit. The right hand is stronger than the wrong hand yet; and the right heart is nearer to the endless secrets of the universe than the wrong heart, and knows more about the power of the seen over the unseen, and of the unseen over the seen. We must not talk about the impossible when the bad man has failed; for the man of God may be hastening to the task, and he is going to succeed according to the measure of his godlikeness. A prophet will have a prophet's reward, and a righteous man will have a righteous man's. Wait for Elisha after Gehazi.

Goodness is power? Yes. What is its power? We shall see. The man of God has gone into the chamber of death, and the door is shut. No one questions the rightness of that. Too high and holy a transaction is this for parade or witnesses. "And when thou hast entered into thy closet, thou shalt shut thy door, and pray to thy Father which is in secret." The man of God had long learned that condition of power. What of the mother now? Had not hope already become more daring? The little chamber where she had laid her dead boy seemed less the abode of death since the good man had entered it upon business holy and merciful. The door was shut; but she knew what was doing within, and she believed. It was not Jesus that was there, to whom the dead seemed within such easy call. But the power was the same. In the house of death one was a servant, the other a Son. Jesus spake, and it was done; the son of the widow, the daughter of Jairus, the brother of Mary, lived again at his word. But the servant must strive unto exhaustion. He seems not so near the living Father. The God-man commands; the man of God wrestles like Jacob and must prevail through faith and work. Flesh touches flesh, eye looks into eye, mouth breathes into mouth, hands clasp hands. Seven times between his strong crying unto God as he paces the chamber, does he labor thus to impart his own life to the dead boy. At last, by the strenuousness of love and the violence of tears, the kingdom of heaven is taken. The child lives; and the mother clasps the prophet's feet before she embraces her living child. With such a woman gratitude for love's luxury must precede its enjoyment. Then "she took up her son and went out."

What is the power of goodness? It saves from death, and gives life to the dead. This truth deepened, broadened, made as comprehensive as life itself, is the crowning result of the Shunammite's history.

Narrow the lesson down to the mere resuscitation of a child by the prophet, and you get the magic wand, but lose the divine power that wielded it. "The prophets of the olden time were no mesmerizers, but servants of the living God, who 'stood before him,' and whose business it was to bear witness of him in word and deed." They were men of God, joined to him. The goodness of God flowed into them and through them; it was a power that saved from death and that gave life. Death comes and stays when that power is wanting. It is the rule of all common life to-day. In this sense the Shunammite was a modern, and we are Shunammites. Her faith in the power of goodness was not a spasm into which she was thrown by calamity. We do not get into real life and out of almost unconscious death by a spasm. That would be a miracle indeed, and would have to be wrought often, we are so blind, and learn so slowly.

Did the high philosophy of life that you know, if you have tasted death and been made teachable, come to you by that swift method? Or has it been gradually saturating your patient soul as life has worn, tossed, and strained you, and made you old? How slowly opens the inner eye that sees the thousand-handed death which is ever clutching at you! In all the waste of mind and spirit; in all the deceptions that sin mixes with self-sacrifice, philanthropy, and religion; in all the ghastly masquerade of self-righteousness; in all the flattery of emasculated piety, — you did not know how much death there was, and that the living could be so dead without the life of God. You did not know that the life of God measured its power in you by your own passion for it. But you have been learning. You began like the Shunammite.

One day a prophet passed your door with face like unto the Son of Man's. Your heart opened to his as you gave

him hospitality. You perceived that he was holy, bade him abide, and made room for his abiding. The day that your little child died upon your knees, or that other day that husband, wife, substance, health, or hope, left you, and woe's sharp hands tore you, you knew where power was. You knew whom you believed. No signs of power deceived you. You hurried by them, and clasping His feet you cried: "I will not leave thee: thou hast been my help; leave me not, neither forsake me, thou God of my salvation." And he said, "I am come that ye might have life, and that ye might have it more abundantly." And girded with that more abundant life, you arose and went your way.



## Lesson X. March 8.

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### NAAMAN HEALED.

*2 Kings v: 1-14.*

BY REV. GEORGE S. GOODSPEED, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

NOWHERE else in the whole Bible do great things and small things, judged from the human point of view, crowd so persistently and closely together as in this narrative about Naaman. It is a perpetual display of striking contrasts, wherein the little things of God's choosing overtop, beat back, and cast down the mighty things of this world.

1. *The great man.* As the world rates men, Naaman was great. He was next in power after the king. He was the greatest soldier in the kingdom. He must have honored that position, too, for the record tells us that he was the saviour of Syria. It appears that he had, in one of the great periodical raids of the Assyrian kings, taken the field against the invaders and driven them back. The king esteemed and trusted him. Between him and his sovereign there was none of that suspicion or that fear of rivalry or of treachery which, as in the case of Justinian and Belisarius, have so often marked the relations of monarchs with their successful generals. Yet Naaman, noble in presence and mighty in valor, a man above reproach in the sight of king and people, with all his gifts, graces, and renown, had one other distinguishing characteristic. It was a slight one, which perhaps



few besides himself knew, well as he knew it, — it was a little spot of leprosy.

You are not to suppose that leprosy had covered his person, or was such as to keep him from active life or association with his fellows. The leprosy of the Bible has little in common with those horrible forms of disease which appear in the so-called lepers of to-day, — that, for instance, of the poor victims at Molokai. It was only a little spot of plague that troubled Naaman; but the disgrace and mortification of being called a leper made his life miserable, in spite of all its gratifications of pleasure and ambition.

In the field, at the head of his troops, his brand-mark might be well-nigh forgotten; but on court-days, when the people shouted and the courtiers bowed as the king, on his general's arm, passed by to the throne, we can imagine how the hot flush swept over the great man's face as he detected the whispered comment of the people, or felt the eyes of the crowd fixed on that reddish patch of his cheek, where the word "leper" already stood out, as though written in letters of fire. Naaman the great was cursed by his little blotch of leprosy.

In this he represents many a person who has lived since his day, — people to be envied in all respects save one, who would be supremely happy were some one thing the reverse of what it is; almost on the top of the ladder, whom a trifle holds back from the final step. But the petty lack makes them profoundly wretched.

"Oh, the little more, and how much it is!

And the little less, and what worlds away!"

So they moan, with the poet, over the absence of what would make their cup overflow, or the presence of what taints it. Sometimes the curse is a soaring ambition coupled with physical defect which renders the man incapable or ridiculous.

Sometimes keen wit and broad culture are yoked with a stammering tongue or an infirm temper. Sometimes with proud lineage goes the loosened strand in the brain, or with vast wealth the ghost of family discord. Such cases are legion, — nay, do not all of us ache with some plague-spot, in whatever mars our happiness or humbles our pride? Even humanity itself, with its immense strivings and marvellous achievements, has its poison-drop of sin coursing through its veins and palsying its best life.

2. *The great lady.* But Naaman was not alone in the misfortune that darkened his heart and home. One of the bitter things about this spot of leprosy was that it bred sorrow in another heart than that of its primary victim. When we read of Naaman's wife we inevitably expect to find her too in the atmosphere of grief. She shares his honors, but she shares his trials as well. Her womanly sympathy makes hers all Naaman's woe and shame over his badge of disgrace. Alas! her sympathy cannot cure, her love cannot heal. Daughter of a house of princes, accustomed to rule, she has no power to make that spot depart. Beautiful with the high-born beauty of Syrian nobility, she cannot charm it away. Great lady, — what is all her greatness worth while that canker is gnawing into the heart of him whom she loves, and for whom she would give her life? Linked to his suffering, she is yet powerless to alleviate it. If he is a leper, she is the wife of a leper. Miserable trio, — great captain, great lady, and a spot of leprosy!

God has a gleam of light for these suffering ones, to fall when hope has faded from their hearts and misery crowned their brows. But how strangely it comes! The closed door opens, and behold the taper uplifted in the hand of a little captive serving-maid from the land of Israel!

"Would God my lord were with the prophet that is in Samaria! then would he recover him of his leprosy."

So spoke the child, and cheered the desponding hearts of her exalted master and mistress. Her sympathy for them overleapt the bounds that national hatred and personal wrong had built high about it. In sight of their suffering, the maiden's heart cannot hate them. Would that all of us longer kept the tender, commiserating heart of youth amid the rivalries and selfishness of this hard world ! The scene reveals what the ministry of a child may accomplish. It also reveals the power of simple and apparently trifling forces to direct the course of human events. How strange that in God's providence the slave girl should have the key to the door which master and mistress had in vain tried to unlock ! Let no one call his sphere narrow or his work fruitless. Any moment may bring such a turn in affairs that the Lord may use us in conserving the greatest and most precious interests of humanity. The bird's careless song, the wind's swift sweep, the lily's bloom, the child's chance word, — God employs them all in the great work of salvation, and he will use us if we are in the path where he would have us walk. The great man's little spot, which gave him so much unhappiness, he was put in a way to remove by the little word of a little girl.

3. *The great kings.* The lord and lady of course eagerly seize this crumb of comfort. They consult their king. Naaman is despatched with all haste to the land of Israel, bearing a letter to its king. Monarchs take up the affair, but they handle it most awkwardly. He of Damascus sends away the patient, and shifts upon the other the responsibility for his cure. The king of Israel must needs receive the sufferer with due honor, but is filled with consternation at the accompanying message. Does his royal brother think him a god, to control the forces of Nature ? He suspects a plot. The embassy and request is but a ruse to fasten a quarrel upon him. Alas for Naaman ! his cure is farther off than

ever; it is to no purpose that he has exposed his shame, and has brought on an international complication besides.

What a picture of great people trying to put things to rights! "The kings of the earth set themselves, and the rulers take counsel together." Royal correspondence, royal processions, royal presents passing hands; yet the spot of leprosy is still there, and besides, a cloud of war on the horizon, threatening soon to burst if the situation does not change. How true to history and human experience is all this! How it tallies with the interminable succession of royal quarrels and royal pacifications on the part of those kings and kinglets who would fain manage the world!

But the situation does change. Though the king of the North has forgotten to mention the physician's name, and it does not occur to his brother in the South to turn to the true source of power, healing for Naaman is at hand. For there is a prophet in Israel, — a man who has in his soul a sense of God's power, and who can speak with a voice of authority overriding that of king and captain.

The central point of the whole story lies here. Its chief purpose is to exalt the prophet, to show that when kings failed, prophets succeeded; that upon these laymen of God's appointment the magnates of the earth must lean in the most desperate crises of their worldly affairs. It was the glory of the prophets of Israel, and it is the glory of the prophetic office wherever exercised, boldly to stand athwart currents of evil in human affairs, and to rip up the fixed order of vicious thought and habit into which society fossilizes, startling people into attention to the words of everlasting life.

Remember, it is a layman who now seizes the direction of this case. The fact is typical. God still has such work for his laymen, — work which, as we are just beginning to realize, can best be done by laymen, provided they have the old prophetic spirit. The man who has best solved many

modern religious problems is a layman with the prophetic spirit, — I mean D. L. Moody. May God send us more such, setting aside king and priest, if need be! — men who with consciousness of a God-given authority shall say touching the sinner whom a regular ministry cannot bring to Christ, “Why rend ye your garments in despair? Send him hither to me.”

4. *The great expectation.* Naaman, with all the splendor of his train, comes into the presence of the prophet. He has himself revealed to us what his thoughts were as he journeyed. Everything is uncertain as yet, though the prophet's clear message has inspired hope. He begins to lay out the probable procedure in advance. The prophet, he thinks, will do thus and thus. On what does he build this air-castle of expectation? On his reputation, position, abilities, achievements, — on anything but the one fact which he accounted so insignificant. Was he not well known throughout the land as a man of rank? Even Israel is but too well aware of his exploits. He is a statesman as well as a valorous and skilful warrior. These facts, he imagines, must surely determine the prophet's action and bearing toward him. How strange that in all this dreaming the great captain forgets the substance of his errand, the very object of his journey, — the removal of his leprosy!

Forecasts do not necessarily become facts. The colors with which we paint our aircastles are not always fast colors, and the castles often have to be rebuilt. Short, sharp, unceremonious, was the message which met Naaman at the prophet's door. “Go and wash in Jordan seven times,” — message delivered to the proud noble at the mouth of a servant, — “and thy flesh shall come again to thee, and thou shalt be clean.”

5. *The great rage.* Judged by the canons of Eastern politeness, the prophet in his treatment of Naaman was

outrageously discourteous. We are not concerned to find excuses for him ; but it must be remembered that he now had a notable opportunity to humble an old enemy of his nation. Who knows whether the little maid, the captive in the Syrian household, who told them of the prophet, had not been dear to him ? He may well have been irritated at the pomp and show with which this noble sought him. No doubt the prophet knew the man's arrogant temper and haughty spirit. It was with a kind of grim humor that he sent down his brief message, so lacking in civility. He was not going to show any sympathy for the proud courtier. Let him wash and be healed if he would ; if not, what did Elisha care ?

Such a bearing on his part had its natural effect. The reversal of Naaman's expectations, with so scant politeness, fired him into a rage. He, too, was in part excusable. He had been grossly insulted by a man of the nation whose armies he had defeated in battle. Yet it was foolish that, resenting the manner in which the prescription was given him, he was led by his rage to resent the prescription itself. Bathe in this miserable stream, so foul as compared with the pure rivers of his native land ! He would remain a leper first.

Naaman appears well beside that young man in the Gospels who went away from Christ "sorrowful," afraid to give up his wealth. But while the sorrow of the one was pitiable, the rage of the other was ridiculous, particularly in a leper.

Here appears another of the strange contrasts of which we spoke. Over against the mighty lord stands the insignificant servant. To his proud master's great rage he opposes an unostentatious word of common-sense. The slave instructs the master. At the risk of his head he confronts the wrathful captain, and with great shrewdness says in effect, "Father, thou mightest have found it much harder to be cured. The prophet simply makes the way easy for thee." The sugges-

tion may have been sophistical, and was certainly not what Elisha intended. But it resulted well, pricking the bubble of Naaman's anger and recalling him to his senses. He now sees things in a true light. He came to be cured, not to be petted. He came not as a nobleman, but as a sufferer; not as a prince, but as a patient.

O friend, it never pays to ignore facts! Be it pride or be it anger that veils the eyes, the veil does not change what is. Your leprosy of sin is a fact as truly as was Naaman's leprosy. You may forget it, you may deny it; but you must reckon with the fact at last,— nay, at once, for as long as sin goes unrepented, life is upon a low plane: you cannot walk with God. Naaman's anger led him for the instant to forget his leprosy, but did not remove it. The red patch grew wider and wider; deeper, hour by hour, did the filthy virus work. Will the affronted warrior in his pride fix forever his leprosy in his life? And wilt thou, O friend, in thy obstinacy and anger, make an eternal compact with sin?

6. *The great submission.* Thanks to the wise words of his servant, Naaman betakes himself to the Jordan and carries out the prophet's injunction. It was a little thing, yet the result that followed was great. "His flesh came again like unto the flesh of a little child." Better than that, and before it, his heart had become like the heart of a little child. He had entered, through that narrow door, which is nevertheless as wide as the world, into the kingdom of God, whither any may come who lift up hands of trustful obedience unto the Father of all flesh, and perform without flinching the Father's will. Will ye not listen, victims of sinful pride and worldly disappointment, to the word of the servant? Yield yourselves to God's better way, find satisfied the deepest desires of your heart, and healed its grievous woe, through Jesus Christ our Lord.



The Naaman story suggests two or three reflections.

The one thing which made Naaman miserable was the means to his largest advance in prosperity and fame. But for that leprous spot we should never have heard of him. That it was which brought him into the path of God's providence, where in God's light he lives and shines to his own honor and our blessing. Chief captain, favorite of the king, idol of the people and the army, — he thought those distinctions his assurance of immortality. Instead, his defect, and that alone, made him the child of story. It is often thus. The defect, the oft-lamented weakness of body or of temper, God constitutes the path to those honors which all the man's graces and talents could never win. Even sin, that deadly blight and weight upon humanity, coming whence or how we do not know, weakening, degrading, and threatening its every victim, God overrules to his glory, and may overrule to the everlasting weal of the sinner himself. Without it, the exceeding richness of God's grace as manifest in forgiveness could not have been known.

Neither Elisha's treatment of Naaman nor his prescription for him is an example for others. Both reveal the spirit of the Old Testament rather than that of the New. For most religious teachers Elisha's method would be madness. It had in it much of the earthly, and not enough of the heavenly. "Believe or be damned" is not the style of Christ's preaching. Paul beseeches "by the meekness and gentleness of Christ." Yet Elisha acted wisely. He knew his man, and aimed his blow accordingly. There are doubtless people to-day who need to be treated thus. If you have such to deal with, let your blow be swift, sure, and hard, like that crushing message of the prophet. But remember that for the one rebuff given to the Syro-Phœnician woman when our Lord was in much the same position as Elisha, his ministry shows innumerable rejoinders of tender, sympathetic helpfulness.



What would Elisha's curtness have accomplished, apart from the exhortation of the great man's slave? Rough handling converted Naaman; sympathy and love made of Saint John the glory of the Church. The latter qualities win the most universally; they are Christ's weapons.

Take a final look at these strange contrasts. The Syrian lord is also a leper; the great lady learns from the little maid; the prophet rescues from perplexity the disconcerted king; the noble receives orders from the layman; the enraged courtier is brought back to reason by the servant; and the proud and experienced captain of Syria's armies comes to have the flesh and the heart of a little child. Shall we not in all this learn God's way? Let such facts teach us rightly to estimate life and life's forces, — to see them from God's point of view. May they help bring us to Jesus, so meek and lowly, so despised by the world, enabling us to understand the offence and the glory of his cross!

## Lesson XI. March 15.

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### GEHAZI PUNISHED.

*2 Kings v: 15-27.*

By REV. B. A. GREENE, LYNN, MASS.

THIS whole chapter, like a branch of a thrifty vine, is laden with the choicest fruit. We have already in the first half seen how position and misfortune may be joined hand in hand, illustrating the fact that human life is conditioned; that there will always be something to make it incomplete, — if not leprosy, another cause just as real and disturbing.

Fortunate for Naaman that the little Israelitess lived in his home; fortunate for him that among his servants were those wiser than himself, who dissuaded him at the crisis from going back in a fit of anger, with his leprosy still upon him. For as we behold him at the beginning of our lesson to-day, we see that his flesh has come again like the flesh of a little child. He is clean. His deep, deep longing, "Oh, if I could only have full health again!" is completely realized. Let us now study some of the lessons which immediately follow the healing. They are to be found in three clusters, growing out of three relationships, which may be marked as follows: (1) Naaman and Elisha; (2) Gehazi and Naaman; (3) Elisha and Gehazi.

#### I. NAAMAN AND ELISHA.

In this cluster, consider —

1. *The evidential value of experience.* "Now I know." Naaman had heard of the Jehovah of Israel, of the wonder-

ful deeds wrought by him ; but were not the reports similar to those about other gods ? To him they were. And when he came to Elisha's house he expected to find a prophet like those he had seen before. He therefore came prepared to win favor in the usual way, by giving costly presents. He was expecting to be received with the distinguished attention becoming one in his station. Failing to get this, his prejudices were aroused. Whereas before he may have regarded the Israelites' God as one among many, now he looks upon him rather with disdain. At last, in response to the urgent entreaty of his servants, he is won over. He submits to what he regards humiliating conditions, and in consequence is perfectly healed. What shall he say in that transcendently happy moment ? He knows that the waters of the Jordan have not done the work, nor a magical power in the prophet. The very conditions which aroused his prejudice at first now speak all the more convincingly of the Jehovah whom Elisha serves. He feels the glow of restored health ; he beholds it in the changed color of his flesh. His whole being thrills with the transformation, and as he stands there in the presence of all his attendants and before Elisha, he says, "*Now I know* that there is no God in all the earth but in Israel." He had unmistakable evidence that moment in his life,—the very best of evidence, living, conscious, blessed in its effects. It was that which the blind man healed by our Saviour had when he replied to the critics about him. "One thing I know, whereas I was blind, now I see. He hath opened my eyes. A marvellous thing ! If this man were not of God, he could do nothing."

Knowing God through experience : evidence in one's self : that is not only possible, but a way to conviction which Scripture plainly intimates as easy to all. "Will to do his will, and ye shall know the teaching ;" "Humble yourselves in the sight of God, and he shall lift you up" into blessed

companionship of spirit with him. And just as of old he commanded the light to shine out of darkness, so into the submissive heart he pours "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Evidence is not confined to what the eye sees, the ear hears, the heart reasons. It is God's pleasure to reveal himself in the soul directly. Through submission Naaman came to know assuredly that there was a God in Israel. Acting upon the testimony of others, led the way to unmistakable evidence in his own consciousness. Only in that way can men to-day come to a satisfying knowledge of Jehovah.

2. *The promptings of gratitude.* The very first words after the account of Naaman's cleansing are these: "And he returned to the man of God." He did not go away silently, selfishly to his own land. It was in his heart to take his whole company back to Elisha's house, and in their presence acknowledge the great blessing which he had received. Not far from this very spot, in a later century, ten lepers were cleansed by our Lord, when, we read, only one returned to give glory to God. That one is commended, and visited with still further and richer blessing. Naaman is like that one. He not only makes acknowledgment in words, he wishes to express his thankfulness in a more substantial way. "I pray thee take a present of thy servant." Elisha is intent upon still keeping up a distinction between himself and other prophets. He wants Naaman to be confirmed in his estimate of the Jehovah he serves. He therefore refuses absolutely to take a present, though urged and urged to do so. Naaman's gratitude, so genuine, strong, urgent, shows at once the thoroughness of his cure and the nobility of his character.

It is an example for us in view of our cleansing from the leprosy of sin. We should not only have gratitude in the heart, but as well thankfulness on the lips, and persistently

endeavor to show in all proper ways that we thoroughly appreciate the glorious blessing.

3. *A faith joyous, but still groping for light.* It is a moment of exhilaration. Joy over the wonder wrought moulds the expression of Naaman's faith. The faith is simple, child-like: "No God in all the earth but in Israel." "Thy servant will henceforth offer neither burnt offering nor sacrifice unto other gods, but unto the Lord." In these statements is revealed first of all faith in Jehovah, and then not merely a recognition of him as supreme over all other gods, but an acknowledgment of him as excluding all other gods. Naaman then and there renounced polytheism. No stronger utterance to this effect could be made.

Yet he does not seem to be altogether disentangled from his old heathen notions. His spiritual vision waits to be perfectly clarified, his new faith still struggling with old beliefs. He appears to locate Jehovah in Palestine: "No God in all the earth but in Israel." Further, while he cherishes the fixed purpose in his heart to worship Jehovah only, he seems to deem it necessary to carry away with him some of Israel's soil, with which to make an acceptable altar of sacrifice. He moreover thinks the only course left him is to return home, and not only to continue living in his own land, but to keep close still to his royal master, assisting him even in his worship in the house of Rimmon. He feels the incongruity of this, and asks in it the pardon of Jehovah. His religious ideas are cloudy, though clearing. There is here no logical analysis of feelings or philosophical treatment of motives. The writer gives us a word-picture of life as it presented itself in the concrete. It shows a mixture of elements strange and contradictory; but we find in the actual to-day precisely the same.

One thing, however, is patent,—the Syrian captain had faith in Jehovah, and a corresponding purpose of heart, sincere and strong. Groping, he was groping toward the light.

Like the man whom Christ was healing, he might have said: "I see men as trees walking." What he needed was the after-touch of divine power, as had that restored blind man mentioned in Mark. Jesus "put his hands *again* upon his eyes and made him look up, and he saw every man clearly." It was such an after-touch of divine power to which Elisha committed Naaman in those parting words, "Go in peace." In them he neither approves nor disapproves of the course which Naaman had marked out. As Dr. Stearns puts it, "The miracle was to be a preacher to the Syrians that there was no God like Jehovah; the special teaching to the person being in the prophet's mind a minor matter to be found out by the inner working of the Divine Spirit."

What men supremely need is genuine faith. We want to be sure of the great central fact of the divine life energizing in our human life. Then there may be a wide margin for the exercise of liberty in specific acts, as regulated by an enlightened conscience. A "God bless you" to a new convert, with a generous trust in the God who has already begun in him the good work, is wiser help than minute and exacting detail in prescribing his conduct. Healthy spiritual life cannot be run in moulds of our manipulation. Its fashion must come from within and from above. It is born of God, not made by man.

## II. GEHAZI AND NAAMAN.

It is a pity that we are compelled to introduce such a character as that of Gehazi before Naaman gets out of the limits of Palestine. Why is it that when some are entering into light and blessing, others already in that enjoyment seem insanely bent on sacrificing it? Why do so many foolishly make good the occasion of evil? These questions are more easily asked than answered. The fact, however, remains, and we are to see how it manifests itself.

1. *How men argue themselves into sin.* Gehazi reasoned: "This proud Syrian has received a very great blessing. Health is next to life itself. He could have got health nowhere else on earth. He appreciated the great favor, and being rich, wanted to return silver and gold in payment. It is a shame that all this treasure should go back to Syria, turning the balance of trade against my nation. I will run after the captain and save some of it. Naaman wished to leave the *whole* in the land that gave him healing. I will get a portion; no one will suffer, no one shall be the wiser." So covetous Gehazi muses, ignoring and threatening to thwart the obvious and lofty purpose of his master in declining Naaman's treasure.

Gehazi was like Achan, — he coveted; he reached out his hand for that which he knew it would be a sin for himself and a damage to his country and its religion for him to have. He knew the meanness and the evil which his suggestion involved, and could not do the wrong until he had argued himself into it. So it is ever. Wrong is wrong, and we feel this.

"Yet seen too oft, familiar with her face,  
We first endure, then pity, then embrace."

When we are tempted to do a wrong thing from which we at first shrink, strong is our temptation to suggest reasons why we may possibly do it without criminality. Most of the defalcations which astonish the public probably originate in that way. At first there was no thought of the crime as even possible. "The money is not mine at all," the bank-clerk says, determined not to touch it except as a servant, for the advantage of those he serves. Time goes on, money meantime his constant companion. Some evil day the suggestion comes to him: "This money is doing no one any good. More is always here than is called for. What harm if I invest a little of it in this speculation, sure to succeed?"



Having made a handsome profit, I will return all I took. No one will suffer, and I shall be greatly helped."

That is the way men argue themselves into courses of action which turn out unrighteous and criminal. They allow the god of this world to tamper with their moral vision little by little. They come to see moral things awry, until by and by they call evil good, and good evil. The Devil reasoned with Eve, and that initial practice has been kept up ever since. No people go into sin admitting it to be sin and offering no excuse. Every sinner begins as Gehazi did, by allowing to work upon himself the bewildering influence of fallacious argument.

"Oh, what authority and show of truth  
Can cunning sin cover itself withal!"

2. *How one sin calls for another.* It is not so easy to get this money which Naaman is willing to part with. He is even now quite a piece on his journey out of the country. What course shall be adopted? The mind is always inventive when it feels the pressure of inordinate desire. This therefore is Gehazi's ingenious lie to Naaman when he overtakes him: "My master hath sent me, saying, Behold even now there be come to me from Mount Ephraim two young men of the sons of the prophets: give them, I pray thee, a talent of silver and two changes of raiment." Gehazi was going to be a capitalist.

Sin never can get far in its career without the help of lying. It is the ever-necessary device. Unless the initial sin is abandoned, the call for falsehood becomes more and more imperative. He who commits himself to any course of deceit finds that the occasions for the exercise of his ingenuity continually increase. There is cross-questioning outside the court-room. How strange it is that men will run all this hazard, knowing how awful and certain it is, aware,



as they must be, that having taken the first step in the way of evil, they cannot but wax worse and worse!

With Naaman Gehazi succeeds admirably, as is often the case with sin at the start. Naaman said: "Take [not one but] *two* talents and two changes of raiment, and let my servants carry them home for you." He consents, but takes care that the servants are dismissed before they come into the prophet's neighborhood. He takes the pelf from them, deposits it in a secret place, and appears to think himself secure. His plan is apparently a complete success. The goods he coveted are in his possession. Naaman gave them to him with his own hand. He did not steal them. They are in his house, to be kept until he may see fit to use them. No one will know anything about it. How many, many times have other men done as Gehazi did,—succeeding in evil and thinking themselves secure! Never are they so. Let us see the outcome here.

### III. ELISHA AND GEHAZI.

Gehazi is still servant, and he must meet his master. Success does not yet warrant an abrupt break in the old relations. He finds himself in the fast grip of circumstances. Temporary success, whether gained ill or righteously, never brings the life into complete freedom. We are always in a sense the children of circumstances. Heredity is no surer or more appreciable a force than environment.

1. *Consider how sin is made to disclose itself.* When the servant stood by his master, "Elisha said unto him, Whence comest thou, Gehazi? And he said, Thy servant went neither hither nor thither." Were we not right? How frightfully prolific a first lie becomes!

Unfortunately for him, Gehazi is dealing with one who has more than ordinary vision. "Went not my heart with thee when the man turned again from his chariot to meet thee?"

In the lightning-flash of that question the craven villain sees his wickedness exposed. How did he ever dream that he could be secure? Did he not know that he was associated with a man of God, who had brought from death to life the Shunammite's son? Nay, did not his guilty act join close upon yet another display of his master's superhuman power? Sin had blinded him, as sin always blinds. Whatever ingenuity he showed in his approach to Naaman was totally eclipsed by his folly in imagining that he could deceive Elisha.

"Be sure *your* sin will find you out," my friend. We do not deal with Elishas, but we do deal with God. Elisha was simply a voice of God. Every age has its divine voices. So has every individual's environment. Sin may prosper at first, it may bring you home laden with double spoil; but there awaits it the cross-questioning of life's environment, some lightning-flash from the high arch of God's providence, which will inevitably reveal the leprosy of your soul.

2. *The punishment.* "Is it time to receive money and to receive garments?" Oh, how Gehazi's soul must have writhed under that question, spoken by one in the secret counsels of the Most High! Jehovah will assure the Syrians that there is truly a prophet in Israel. Offered gifts are refused, that the teaching may the more thoroughly convince. Shall a servant obtrude with impunity his selfishness to thwart the divine endeavor? Shall he be permitted to win lucre out of calamity, out of the most sacred experiences in life, and unchallenged to sin against Jehovah in the very blaze of the display of his power? Nay, a prophet prevents, a prophet thunders God's anathema: "The leprosy of Naaman shall cleave unto thee and unto thy seed for ever. . . . And he went out from his presence a leper as white as snow." Beyond the shame of his discovery and the terrible indignation of the prophet is the perpetual leprous brand of Jehovah's

wrath. Miriam for seven days, Uzziah and Azariah for a lifetime, felt the weight of a divine curse upon them; but Gehazi has the added misery of knowing that he has brought an abiding calamity into his home.

Oh, the mystery of life! Who can understand its interblendings of influence and responsibility? Who can weigh in equitable balances its comparative privileges, opportunities, and dangers? In the shadow of that threat as it falls on the man and the home, we stand with many a perplexing query. Baffled, we say to ourselves: "In due time at any rate it will be seen that the Judge of all the earth has been through the ages doing right." Meantime let our eyes be open to the fact that we individually have it in our power to draw others into the maelstrom of our suffering and sorrow, — nay, that the very nature of our life forces us to do this.

Which would you rather be, — Naaman, generously grateful for his healing, of joyous faith, even though groping for the light, on his way home, with a prophet's benediction echoing in his soul; or Gehazi, the once honored servant and companion of Elisha, arguing himself into and committing sin in the very blaze of the matchless display of God's compassion and power, and then going out from his master's presence white with leprosy, and knowing that the curse which he has brought upon himself he has entailed upon his children and his children's children? .

## Lesson XII. March 22.

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### ELISHA'S DEFENDERS.

*2 Kings vi: 8-18.*

By Prof. GEORGE R. HOVEY, RICHMOND, VA.

THE lesson opens amid the dangers and suspense of guerrilla warfare settling over the land. Northern Israel is reaping the harvest of her past sowing. Having cut herself off from Jerusalem and allied herself with heathen nations, she had lost the intense patriotism and the pure religion which had their source in Zion. She surrendered her power when she forgot her peculiar mission and the Almighty's abiding presence. United Israel had formerly made Syria one of her provinces. Now that province had become independent and powerful. Its garrison held Ramoth-gilead, the eastern fortress of Israel, its armies penetrated to her very capital, and Samaria would have fallen but for the interposition of God. Marauding companies seem to have roamed almost at will through the land.

Under such circumstances Ben-hadad, king of Syria, in his secret chamber counsels where to send his bands. Spies report to him weakly defended places, or more probably places where the king of Israel alone or with small force is about to pass by. Thither he decides to send his troops. But in vain; Jehoram, king of Israel, is warned. "Beware that thou pass not such a place." Not once or twice, but many times did he heed such warning, and sending to the place designated, find the host of Syria ready to attack him.

Ben-hadad at last became convinced that there was treachery among his servants. His only question was: Who is the traitor? For by no other means can Jehoram learn my plans. False assumption! And yet how many, like Ben-hadad, as if they had measured all forces, say: Only in this way can this be done!—belittling Nature and God. And with how many, as with him, is the suspicion of evil in others only an indication of evil uppermost in their own minds; for he had probably encouraged treachery in Israel. And how often do we find at last that such a suspicion is as great a misjudgment as it is an injustice! Fortunately a servant, wiser than his master, was at hand to correct the mistake.

It was a strange story which the servant told. There is no traitor, "my lord, O king; but Elisha, the prophet that is in Israel, telleth the king of Israel the words that thou speakest in thy bedchamber." Here, as well as throughout this incident, an invisible power works for Elisha. Unseen, it is all-seeing. Darkness hideth not from it, but the night shineth as the day. It hears the secrets of the chamber; it thwarts them; it publishes them throughout Israel. No secret is safe. A guilty conscience may well be haunted with the dread that at any moment men may know and God must know its secret.

The king of Syria saw that Jehoram could not be taken while Elisha remained free to reveal his plans. Against Elisha all his efforts must be directed. He had learned what was the vital point in the conflict, what would give him success in the great struggle of his life. But he had not learned the true character of his enemy. Did he imagine that the God who could warn a king where the enemy lay in wait for him could not warn the prophet where the same enemy purposed to seize him? Or did he suppose that if the great leader of God's people should be taken away, the

God who had raised him up would be unable to raise up other leaders to take his place? Thinking that the work of God depended on one man, he assailed Elisha.

We have now reached the main incident of the lesson, — the conflict between Elisha and Syria. The first point suggested by the preceding verses is *the origin of the conflict*. Without doubt here, as almost universally, war may be traced largely to that demon in man, selfishness. Perhaps in the form of ambition it led the king of Syria to attack Israel. For the greatness of a man in his sight was merely the greatness of his possessions, even though obtained by oppression and violence. Perhaps revenge moved him. He could not forget that Israel by God's help had twice, in hill and valley, at Samaria and at Aphek, brought overwhelming defeat and disgrace upon him, and that he had been forced to appear before Ahab a suppliant for life. And now selfishness in the form of desire for vengeance would drive him to the bloody crime of war. This was the spirit of the times. But Ben-hadad was as far from the spirit of Christ, who suffered and taught his followers to suffer, as are those among us who would bring the curse of war to millions of homes in perhaps Europe or China, as well as their own land, rather than humble themselves for peace. They would willingly suffer infinitely more to save their pride than they could possibly suffer in manifesting the great, divine qualities of forbearance and humility. Christian sentiment about war ought to be Christlike.

Elisha too had a part in bringing the assault upon himself. But why need he entangle himself in the war, especially when both sides were so unworthy? Ben-hadad, an ungrateful, superstitious, idolatrous, probably licentious king, ruling a people steeped in vice; Jehoram, better than Ahab his father, but walking in the sins of Jeroboam, the son of Nebat, who made Israel to sin, worshipping the calves, and ruling a

people unfaithful to God. Would he not better shun the contamination of alliance with such men, and wash his hands of all participation in their sins, and sit apart in Dothan, watching and praying and waiting for worthy allies before engaging in the struggle? Elisha thought differently. He may have reasoned: One side is doing good in the world, and fears God, though imperfectly; the other promotes sin. God himself uses imperfect servants, and by that use slowly perfects them; none are perfect here. God would have me work heartily with those from whom there is most hope for his kingdom. I do not indorse the sins of my allies; they know and shall know what I approve and what I condemn. Jehoram and Israel, however unworthy, are nevertheless God's servants, and with them is the hope of his kingdom; I must help them. Whatever Elisha's thoughts, he joined heartily with the professed servants of God. He was as efficient as he was godly. He saved Israel from Syria, and afterwards led them to a purer worship.

On the other hand, there are few more useless people than those who refuse to work with imperfect men. When a party or church or pastor or any fellow-worker has manifest failings, a small and narrow soul is likely to stand aloof; an earnest, useful soul, like Elisha's, to join heartily in the work. Refusal to co-operate is a last resort, to be adopted only when more can actually be accomplished for God by effort under other relations.

But without any such reasoning Elisha would have been with Israel, for he was a patriot. He tenderly loved his country, — not his country, right or wrong, but his country right, or to be made right! He loved it enough to criticise and to help it, — to help it against Ben-hadad, and also against corruption and sin within. He loved it because he rightly believed it was the best, and might become unspeakably better. And now in America, together with world-wide love



and sympathy, we may have as reasonable a patriotism as Elisha ; for our country too, with all its faults, has in it brightest promise for the future, if the men of God give it their service.

More broadly, Elisha would never have provoked Ben-hadad had he believed, with many, that his mission was fulfilled in keeping himself right, without interfering with others. Dangerous half-truth ! It is true that only by wise and persuasive words may we interfere with the opinions of another, or with his personal acts that harm neither the bodies nor the souls of men. But when wickedness is fighting to extend its sway over new victims, whether the battle to-day is against us or our neighbor, it is false to humanity to be silent. The roll of heroes and heroic saints would be short indeed without the names of those who have brought persecution and death upon themselves by assailing sin. Silence was safety, but Moses avenged oppression, and was exiled ; Elijah interfered with Ahab, and was hunted from the land ; the prophets denounced the sins of Israel, and were persecuted ; John the Baptist rebuked Herodias' crime, and was beheaded ; and our Lord exposed the hypocrisy of the Jews, and was crucified. All these brought hostility against themselves by themselves first attacking evil. They might have lived in peace, had they held their peace. And to-day that man is left in quiet who thinks and feels never so purely, and yet never proclaims his thoughts or uses his strength to overthrow evil. No public sentiment in school or elsewhere, no oath of secret society, no loyalty to party or country, — nothing has a right to seal a man's lips and bind him to a league with sin. A man, and especially a Christian, owes it to his country and his children, to right and to God, boldly to attack evil, even at the risk of unpopularity, loss, and suffering. Elisha by thwarting Ben-hadad brought the battle on himself.



Secondly, the narrative presents in sharp contrast *the forces engaged*. By night the horses and chariots and great host of Syria took their station on the hills about Dothan. There is no hint that Elisha foresaw their coming. With the knowledge of danger, he might have sought safety elsewhere, and lost the great lesson of the following events. Perhaps he needed to have his faith tried in time of real peril to himself. God had given him knowledge to help the king when in danger ; now he must exercise faith when he himself is in danger. Are not knowledge and strength given us chiefly for the benefit of others, and faith for our own benefit ?

Whether Elisha foresaw this attack or not, his servant, probably one of the sons of the prophets who ministered to him as he had done to Elijah, knew nothing of it. In the early morning, when he arose, perhaps to prepare for a journey to Samaria with his master, he saw the hills filled with the Syrians. They had all the equipments and troops that they could wish. Wrong often seems to have the resources to make her victory certain. Powerful selfish motives, money, numbers, public sentiment, and worldly wisdom are hers, and seem about to crush the right. And when the servant of Elisha saw the forces arrayed against him, he cried out in fear, "Alas, my master ! how shall we do ?" How common a cry from the servants of God ! how natural in the presence of the mighty powers with which we fight ! But how unworthy of sons of God ! How it shows that material things overshadow spiritual, that sight rules while faith is weak. A great dark cloud shuts the heavens out of sight.

"Careless seems the great Avenger ; history's pages but record  
One death-grapple in the darkness 'twixt old systems and the Word.  
Truth forever on the scaffold, Wrong forever on the throne ! —  
Yet that scaffold sways the future, and behind the dim unknown  
Standeth God within the shadow, keeping watch above his own."

Lowell only echoes the thought of Elisha's answer to the cry of his servant: "Fear not, for they that be with us are more than they that be with them. And Elisha prayed, and said: Lord, I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see. And the Lord opened the eyes of the young man, and he saw; and, behold, the mountain was full of horses and chariots of fire round about Elisha."

It was no sight of material forces. The horses and chariots of fire were merely a symbol of the invisible but real power of God. Their position round about Elisha, between him and his enemies, showed that this power was protecting the prophet. Throughout the narrative the same great truth is taught, that God unseen is yet present in power to help his people. The great lesson of the incident for every Christian is: "They that be with us are more than they that be with them." And this is the prayer to be offered for all: "I pray thee, open his eyes, that he may see." That sight of the invisible is merely the Christian's faith.

In this nineteenth century, material age though it is, the lesson of unseen forces has been taught as never before. Force is expected to be unseen, often undiscovered and inexplicable. Steam is invisible so long as it retains its power. As old as the world, it is a modern discovery. Electricity unseen filled earth and air for all the centuries, but was never dreamed of. And now it circulates all about us, unobserved, but of unimaginable power. The worlds are held in space and directed in their courses by the unseen force of gravitation. With these forces unsuspected through the ages, what forces may there not still be unknown to us, as near and as mighty as the mightiest that we know? And higher than these forces of Nature is the unseen mind of man. It makes the wilderness a garden, the block of marble a statue; it tames the steam and electricity, and makes them do its bidding. In the moral kingdom also, unseen forces,

hidden motives and influences, unaccountable hopes and fears, determine the boundaries of nations, the fate of men, the progress of the kingdom of God. These forces, mighty and invisible, are yet ever present. Need we be surprised that the one truly Omnipotent Force in this world is ever present, and yet unseen? Men deny it. But it is as true now as when John the Baptist spoke: "In the midst of you standeth one whom ye know not." The Lord of Life was in that crowd by Jordan. He has said: "I am the life." "Lo, I am with you alway, even unto the end of the world." Unseen, he, the greatest force in human life, stands at our side, more ready than the hosts about Elisha to give hope and joy and safety to him whose eyes are opened. O Lord, open thou our eyes, that we may see! And let the enemies of God fear, the doubting trust, and the faithful rejoice in victory!

The incident would be marred without consideration of the third point, — *the victory of the man of God*. Encouraged at sight of the guardian host, Elisha and his servant seem to have gone down the hill on which Dothan stood, perhaps starting on their journey to Samaria. The enemy too came down from the surrounding hills to seize the prophet. But at his prayer God smote them with blindness, — such a blindness, the word indicates, as came upon the men of Sodom when they were so confused that they could not find the door of Lot's house; perhaps such as was upon those whose eyes were holden when the Lord appeared to them after the resurrection. In their helplessness they were led to Samaria; there their eyes were opened, and they were fed, and sent home to tell of the mercy and power of the God of Israel.

The victory taught Jehoram, as well as Elisha and his servant, that God was almighty, and ever present to help. The frequent deliverances of the past had left Israel still half-hearted and half-believing. And yet God again, by fresh

mercy, tried to woo them back to himself. His words to men are full of the same longing. "How shall I give thee up, Ephraim? How shall I deliver thee, Israel?" "Behold, I stand at the door and knock!" "He is slow to anger;" "he is long-suffering to you-ward, not wishing that any should perish, but that all should come to repentance."

It taught the enemy the folly of fighting against God. But the lesson was only half learned. "The bands of Syria came no more into the land of Israel." Yet after a while the whole force of the kingdom attempted what the smaller bands had failed to do. But without success. "For the Lord of Hosts hath purposed, and who shall disannul it? And his hand is stretched out, and who shall turn it back?"

And for all, there was a lesson little in harmony with the age. Jehoram would kill the enemy in his power; Elijah called down fire on the fifties sent against him. But our Lord rebuked his disciples when they would call down fire upon his enemies. For he "came not to destroy men's lives, but to save them." Elisha had a touch of the new spirit in those old times. He overcame evil with good. He conquered to bless men, to destroy only prejudice and hatred. To lead captive men's opinions was better than to lead in triumph their chariots and horses; to win a heart, better than to gain a corpse! One is divine, the other is brutish. Our hardest battles with intemperance, superstition, corruption, oppression, and every evil should enlighten and bless the sinner, not injure him.

We have seen in this picture many traces of the teaching and the spirit of our Lord. The perfect picture given in his words and life contains the same lines, and differs only in details. He presents the same aggressive warfare against sin, the same unseen Helper all-powerful and ever-blessing, the same certain and gentle victory. This should be our

life. But in contrast with Elisha, we, like our Master, may reach victory through the path of reproach and suffering, and perhaps even death. God spare us! Yet through such a path the victory in our souls, yea, and over the hearts of others, would doubtless be the greater. Oh, that we might believe it! More lastingly and deeply, though differently from Elisha, we shall conquer through the unseen, ever-present Christ, who strengtheneth us.



## THE SECOND QUARTER.



LESSONS FROM KINGS AND PROPHETS.

*(Continued.)*

LESSON

- I. April 5. "Saved from Famine." By Rev. Professor T. HARWOOD PATTISON, D. D.
- II. " 12. "The Good and Evil in Jethu." By Rev. EDWARD JUDSON, D. D.
- III. " 19. "Jonah sent to Nineveh." By Rev. W. O. STEARNS.
- IV. " 26. "Nineveh brought to Repentance." By Rev. JOHN H. MASON.
- V. May 3. "Israel often Reproved." By Rev. F. W. BAKEMAN, D. D.
- VI. " 10. "Israel's Overthrow Foretold." By Rev. D. F. ESTES.
- VII. " 17. "Sin the Cause of Sorrow." By Rev. THOMAS D. ANDERSON.
- VIII. " 24. "Captivity of Israel." By Professor IRA M. PRICE, Ph. D.
- IX. " 31. "The Temple Repaired." By Rev. WILLIAM W. LANDRUM, D. D.
- X. June 7. "Hezekiah, the Good King." By Rev. THOMAS S. BARBOUR.
- XI. " 14. "The Book of the Law Found." By Rev. GEORGE E. HERR.
- XII. " 21. "Captivity of Judah." By Professor SHAILER MATHEWS.



## Lesson I. April 5.

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### SAVED FROM FAMINE.

*2 Kings vii : 1-16.*

BY REV. PROF. T. HARWOOD PATTISON, D.D., ROCHESTER, N. Y.

THE story of the lepers of Samaria must be read in connection with the previous chapter, and our present lesson must, if we are to do justice to its central truth, be carried on to the close of the chapter in which it is found.

Two great calamities had befallen the land of Israel. Its capital was closely besieged by Ben-hadad, king of Syria, and no doubt in consequence of this, famine held the city in its pitiless and wasting grasp. The iron hand of the enemy clinched Samaria tight and fast, and was squeezing the life-blood out of its helpless body. So low had the inhabitants been brought that mothers were driven to eat their own children. It was this which roused the king, Jehoram, the son of Ahab, who in an outburst of fury cried, "God do so and more also to me, if the head of Elisha the son of Shaphat shall stand on him this day." The same blindness which made his father Ahab charge on Elijah the national calamities for which in fact he himself was responsible now showed itself in his yet weaker son. In some way or other Elisha was the cause of all the miseries which were coming thick upon Samaria. An executioner hurried to the prophet's house to carry out the foolish wish of Jehoram. Elisha, surrounded by the elders of the city, was ready for him, and before he arrived bade them detain him at the door, adding,

"Is not the sound of his master's feet behind him?" It would seem as though, perhaps in quick repentance of his hasty words, Jehoram was indeed following close on the heels of the executioner, and that as he reached the house, he cried in querulous rebellion against Jehovah, "Behold, this evil is of the Lord; why should I wait for the Lord any longer?" He meant openly to throw off an allegiance which had never been other than nominal, and his words are proof how much of the spirit of his mother Jezebel now lived in her son. History seems to repeat itself here, only with one important difference. Elijah the prophet had appeared suddenly before Ahab to foretell the long drought; now Elisha, the successor of Elijah, received Jehoram, Ahab's son, with the prophecy that the famine was to be changed to plenty. "Tomorrow about this time shall a measure of fine flour be sold for a shekel, and two measures of barley for a shekel, in the gate of Samaria." Our lesson deals with the fulfilment of this prophecy, the incredulity of the favorite attendant of Jehoram, the visit of the starving lepers to the camp of the enemy, and the flight of the Syrians before the supernatural display of divine power. We will study it as illustrating the contrasted spirits of unbelief and faith, — unbelief as shown in the scoff of the noble, the panic of the Syrians, and the suspicious incredulity of king Jehoram; faith as exhibited in its weakest form by the lepers, as a dawning hope by the king's servant, and as calm confidence by Elisha.

I. *Let us look, first, at three illustrations in this chapter, of the spirit of unbelief.* There are many kinds of unbelief: these three are as common as any.

1. Hearing Elisha's prophecy of plenty to come within twenty-four hours, a certain lord, an aide-de-camp or adjutant in the service of Jehoram, so much his favorite that on his hand — as the king of Syria on Naaman's in a parallel

case — the king leaned, “answered the man of God, and said, Behold, if the Lord would make windows in heaven, might this thing be?” Here is the unbelief which sneers. Of all forms of unbelief it is the most shallow. This was a man who sat in the seat of the scornful. His words are akin to those of Pilate when he asked Jesus, “What is truth?” or of Agrippa when he said to Paul, “With but little persuasion thou wouldest fain make me a Christian.” The poor man was a courtier, a hanger-on upon royalty, and he had the limited range of observation common to such officials. The days of miracles, he says, the days when manna was rained down every morning on the sleeping camp in the wilderness, are past, and God no longer makes windows in heaven. He meets the intense earnestness of Elisha with a jest. But he shall find that this is no joking matter. To him Elisha answers, “Behold, thou shalt see it with thine eyes, but shalt not eat thereof.” To see, but not to share. This is the punishment of frivolity when it dares to make sport of God’s promises. We seem to find here a reflection of the former picture when Israel came to the very borders of Canaan, but for their unbelief perished in the wilderness, and an anticipation of the parable of the rich man when “in hell he lifted up his eyes, and seeth Abraham afar off, and Lazarus in his bosom.” How the punishment was carried out in the case of this noble may be read in the last verse of our chapter.

2. Turning to the host of Syrians beleaguering Samaria, we have the second kind of unbelief, — that which ignores and defies God. The Syrians ought to have felt some gratitude for the way in which God, through his prophet Elisha, had not long before spared them from destruction. But unbelief knows no gratitude. So within a short time Ben-hadad was back again, and Samaria lay at his mercy. Now see how this coarse and brutal spirit of unbelief, which

"laughs at heaven and hell and fate," is put to shame. "The Lord had made the host of the Syrians to hear a noise of chariots, and a noise of horses, even the noise of a great host." They were struck with unreasonable fear, then seized with sudden panic. Fear and panic make the two-edged sword with which such unbelief is often slain.

"There were they in great fear, where no fear was," means just this. If you will not fear God, you shall be afraid of man. If faith cannot have her rightful place, then superstition shall usurp her throne. Herod did not believe in any resurrection, yet he cried out in terror when he heard of Jesus, "This is John the Baptist; he is risen from the dead." The imagination does not surrender her hold on the mind of an unbeliever. There are many more things in heaven and earth than are dreamed of in the philosophy of atheism. To say "There is no God" no more abolishes God than does the ostrich by burying her head in the sand escape the pursuing huntsman. What the Syrians heard may have been thunder in the neighboring hills, or it may have been nothing more than a roaring in their ears; but to their terrified fancy it was the tramp of horses and the roll of chariot-wheels. The Hittites were upon them from the north, and the Egyptians from the south, — mercenaries hired, so they believed, by the king of Israel, in whose capital at that very moment starving and maddened mothers were devouring their offspring! Verily, the credulities of scepticism are only equalled by their ingenuity. One thinks of Elisha, calm and unmoved as the blade of the headsman flashes through the opening in his door, and the Psalmist's words take on a fresh significance: "Thou shalt not be afraid for the terror by night, nor for the arrow that flieth by day, . . . because thou hast made the Lord thy habitation."

3. King Jehoram exhibits the third sort of unbelief. When the news came to him of the panic-stricken Syrians

and the deserted camp, he could not believe it. How should he? The man who will not believe when he may, cannot believe when he should. So unbelief ever acts. It takes away the faculty of faith; and when that faculty is needed, and summoned and searched for, it cannot be found. In its place is only a crooked interrogation-mark. "I will now show you," says the king, "what the Syrians have done to us. They know that we be hungry; therefore are they gone out of the camp to hide themselves in the field, saying, When they come out of the city, we shall catch them alive, and get into the city." He knew all about it. He saw through those plans which had never been formed. What he did not know was that there was a God who had taken this matter into his own hands, and that it was before his thunders that the Syrians were flying pell-mell towards the Jordan. This is an illustration of the unbelief which suspects. Faith is clear, unfaith is clouded. Faith says, "My times are in God's hand;" unfaith says, "There is a lion in the path." The one thing which perplexes, baffles, and outwits unbelief is the simple truth. Be sure there must be something hidden, there is a veiled purpose, this is a deep-laid scheme. On the other hand, there is in faith and in the men who embody it a simplicity which the knowing ones of this world are tempted to call childish. The critic saw occult meanings in Turner's pictures which the painter himself never saw, and, what is more, did not believe were in them. Socrates, Cromwell, Lincoln — what transparently innocent things they said! It takes us a long time to learn that to be obscure is not to be profound, and that to be crystal-clear is not to be shallow.

Very pathetic is this bankruptcy of faith. Because he received not the love of the truth, that he might be saved, God sent Jehoram strong delusions, that he should believe

a lie. He cannot rejoice in this sudden deliverance. His suspicious heart settles it in a moment that it is no deliverance at all, but only a ruse of the foe. Here, then, are three of the many ways in which unbelief revenges itself upon him who harbors it. It is like the evil spirit which tore the man who was possessed of it. Sometimes it sneers, sometimes it is panic-stricken, sometimes it suspects.

II. *We now turn from this dark side of our lesson to look, instead, upon faith.*

1. The faith of the four leprous men is not very noble, but still it is faith. We will call it the faith of despair. To venture into the city from which they were exiled was to starve; to sit where they were was to die: then let them take refuge in the host of the Syrians. There was a faint chance that their enemies might save them alive; "and if they kill us, we shall but die." Yet to this dim faith, as unlike the real grace full grown as the jelly-fish upon the shore is unlike the tree in the forest, came the discovery denied to Jehoram and his nobles. "When they were come to the uttermost part of the camp of Syria, behold, there was no man there." Here was the opportunity for feasting instead of fasting, plenty instead of penury, wealth instead of wretchedness. They had taken their poor pinch of faith, and lo, like the widow's meal, it multiplied into fabulous abundance! Granting that it was the lowest and least sort of faith, you will find that when Jesus was upon this earth he often rewarded it. Only the hem of his garment did it venture to touch, but that touch healed. Only an impulse carried Peter bounding over the boat's side, and then died out as suddenly as it came; but the Lord was ready, and as he caught his sinking disciple he said unto him, "O thou of little faith, wherefore didst thou doubt?"

2. Perhaps not very far above this faith of the lepers, faith in which "despair dilates to power," is that of Jeho-

ram's servant. The account is obscure, but the sense of the speaker seems to be that if the spies die they will be no worse off than the people in the city. To be slain by the sword cannot be worse than to be consumed by the famine. So the man counselled, "Let us send and see." We may call this the faith that hopes. In the teeth of prevailing unbelief, and in actual response to the suspicion of the king himself, one nameless man ventures to advise that before they believe the worst they should give themselves a chance — nothing more than a chance — to believe something better. "Let us send and see" surely means as much as this. It is his way of saying, "Seeing is believing." When to Nathanael's sceptical inquiry, "Can any good thing come out of Nazareth?" Philip answered "Come and see," he set this argument as high as it will ever be set. At this moment it was the very best thing that could be said. Yet it is not true that "seeing is believing." No, seeing is seeing. We remember Thomas. "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger into the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." All this was granted to the disciple, but he can never have a high place among the heroes of faith. "Thomas, because thou hast seen me, thou hast believed: blessed are they that have not seen, and yet have believed." Compared with the unbelief of Jehoram, this faith is worthy of honor; but it must not be mentioned in the same breath with that so lauded in the eleventh chapter of the Hebrews.

3. Now let us look at the faith of absolute certainty. It is represented by Elisha. Elisha and his predecessor, Elijah, were not much alike in the great lines of their characters, but in the matter of faith there was no perceptible difference between them. Here are four points in which Elisha displayed faith which Elijah never excelled.

First, his confidence in Jehovah was so strong that



he feared no earthly power. Not disturbed by the king's message, not ruffled by the appearance of Jehoram himself, he sits in his house, with the elders of the city about him, and is master of the situation. The impetuous, rudderless king drives against this stern rock, and one sees at a glance how the collision between the two must end.

Secondly, we signalize the faith of Elisha by remarking that he dared to prophesy of things which were just to happen. "To-morrow about this time." There must be a point where faith is lost in sight. When he spoke thus, the prophet stood within a few hours of that point. The pitiless belt of Syrians seemed to shut up every avenue of hope from outside the city. Famine had no gleam of promise in her hollow eye as she sat, a forlorn queen, within the city. But in the face of both these malign forces Elisha speaks of fine flour and barley as though they were already glutting the market; and almost while he spoke the Syrians were flying before an imaginary foe, and the prophecy was melting away into fact, as the dim shapes of night become hard realities at the touch of the rising sun.

We may notice as a third feature of Elisha's faith that it concerned itself with the end, and not with the means. How plenty was to take the place of famine, Elisha did not say. Very likely he did not know. Faith looks forward to results; methods she often leaves with God. The machinery may be hidden, but the clock-face is in full sight, and in due time the appointed hour shall strike.

We are led, lastly, to the source of this confident and vigorous faith when we find the prophet in close and constant communion with God. Elisha is emphatically what he is called in rapid succession three times when his prophecies were fulfilled, — "the man of God." As triumphant as Elijah in the mighty confidence that asks and receives, Elisha is seen in the sixth chapter speaking to Jehovah as



a man speaketh to his friend. It was this God behind the prophet who made the prophet strong.

This, then, is the lesson which our passage teaches. "Faith and unfaith can ne'er be equal powers." Unbelief may mistake a sneer for an argument, and confound suspicion with caution, but it is not and never can be supreme. We were meant to believe. If we will not reverence, then we must fear. Deny God if you will, but the forces of Nature, his servants, are arrayed against you. "The stars in their courses," now as of old, "fight against Sisera."

Perhaps your faith is only that which grows on the ragged edge of despair, like the Alpine flower which springs just where the line of eternal snow ceases. Or, a little stronger, it may be lighted up by a gleam of hope. A hard, materialistic world has encouraged it no further than this, — to grant it the right to "send and see." Not by the tender Hand that never broke the bruised reed shall even such faith as that be discouraged. Yet how far above it is the spirit of Elisha, fearless in the face of the king, speaking of the unseen plenty as though, like the executioner, it were at that moment pushing open the door, stretching forth its firm finger to touch the accomplished end, regardless of the difficulties in the way, and with the true temper of the disciple, sitting often at the Master's feet and communing with God!

Are we not like the lepers who found themselves suddenly dropped down in the midst of abundance? The believer in Christ can say that all things are his. Then what is our duty? So long had they been scouted and shunned, perhaps it is no wonder that only when appetite was satisfied and greed had gathered all that it cared for, did those four leprous men begin to think of others. "Then they said one to another, We do not well: this day is a day of good tidings, and we hold our peace. . . . Now therefore come, that we may go and tell the king's household." The earliest

impulse in us all is to listen to the voice of appetite. Later in life, when the fires of appetite burn lower, we hearken instead to the voice of greed. The Devil tempted our Lord in this order, — first, to turn the stones into bread: secondly, to possess himself of the kingdoms of this world and all their glory. But Jesus thrust the temptations aside, and struck at once into the path which led through a life of self-denial to a cross of self-sacrifice. Now, in every case of conversion, “He sees of the travail of his soul, and is satisfied.” The course before us is very plain, — not to gratify appetite, not to listen to ambition, but only to go about doing good. “This day is a day of good tidings.” Kings’ sons and kings’ daughters, who are as yet ignorant of the great salvation, wait for us to carry them the welcome news. “If we tarry till the morning light,” it will be too late. Let each one of us to whom the true riches have been brought, heed the message: “Come, go and tell the king’s household.”

## Lesson II. April 12.

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### THE GOOD AND EVIL IN JEHU.

*2 Kings x: 18-31.*

BY REV. EDWARD JUDSON, D. D., NEW YORK CITY.

HOW deep is the impression which the Bible has made upon the language of plain people! We speak of a man of talent, not dreaming that the word "talent" in this sense is derived from our Lord's parable. Suggested by the Bible are the phrases "Old as Methuselah," "patient as Job," "meek as Moses," "strong as Samson," and a thousand others. So, how natural it is for us to say of a fast driver, "He drives like Jehu." The phrase is from this scripture: "The driving is like the driving of Jehu the son of Nimshi; for he driveth furiously."

People greatly differ as to their liking for horses. Some, like the centaurs of old, seem half horse, and are never so happy as when in the stable or on the track. Others, who have not been brought up among horses, behold them with a sort of awe. This was the case with the ancient Hebrews. They were not accustomed to horses. In war their strong arm was infantry. So late as New Testament times, neither Christ nor Paul nor Peter mentions the horse. But Jehu was fond of horses, and the more mettlesome they were, the better. He loved to startle his countrymen with his break-neck speed, which made them say, "He drives like a madman."

This bold regicide, this rough child of prophecy, the Cæsar, the Cromwell, or the Napoleon of his day, sweeps

through the sacred story like a cyclone. He was a usurper, wading to the throne ankle-deep in blood. For about a century before his reign, which began near 900 B. C. and continued twenty-eight years, the Jewish nation had consisted of the two distinct kingdoms, Israel and Judah, with their two lines of kings, two schools of prophets, and different capitals, Jerusalem in the kingdom of Judah, and in Israel the rival cities of Samaria and Jezreel.

Naturally enough, the two kingdoms were often at war; but just before the time of our story they had been coerced into alliance by strong pressure from Syria, their hostile neighbor, under the rule of Hazael. This harmony had been intensified by intermarriage between the dynasties of Judah and Israel. The weak Ahab and the wicked Jezebel had given in marriage their daughter Athaliah to Jehoram, king of Judah. The result of this union was Ahaziah, who succeeded his father, Jehoram, as king. Meantime Ahab had been succeeded in Israel by his son Joram; so that at the time our story begins, the kings of Judah and Israel were related by blood, Ahaziah being Joram's nephew.

These blood-relations, representing the two allied kingdoms of Judah and Israel, were at war with Syria, Jehu being the commander-in-chief of their allied armies. The camp was intrenched at Ramoth-gilead. Joram, king of Israel, having been wounded at the front, had retired to Jezreel to recover. Ahaziah of Judah, who had not been at the seat of war at all, took a journey from Jerusalem to Jezreel to visit his uncle Joram and to show a proper interest in the common cause.

The hour for the fulfilment of prophecy had struck. Some twenty years before, Jehovah had at Horeb said to Elijah: "Jehu the son of Nimshi shalt thou anoint to be king over Israel. And it shall come to pass, that him that escapeth the sword of Hazael shall Jehu slay." Elijah did

not live to execute this command in his own person, but he transmitted it to his successor, Elisha, and the prophecy was fulfilled through him. Again, about sixteen years before, when Jezebel had caused the cruel death of Naboth, and Ahab was in the very act of taking unrightful possession of his vineyard, Elijah suddenly appeared to him, and in the name of the Lord said: "Hast thou killed, and also taken possession? In the place where dogs licked the blood of Naboth shall dogs lick thy blood, even thine. I will take away thy posterity, and cut off from Ahab every male child. . . . The dogs shall eat Jezebel by the wall of Jezreel."

Part of this horrible prediction had already come true. Ahab, transfixed by an arrow, had died in his chariot, and when they washed the vehicle in the pool of Samaria the dogs "licked up his blood." It was left for Jehu to fulfil the rest of the prophecy, and he did so to the letter. As during the decline of the Roman Empire the commander-in-chief of the Prætorian Guards often unseated the Emperor and put himself in his place, so Jehu, the idol of the soldiery, with the armies of Judah and Israel at his back, usurped the authority of his king, putting to death at one fell stroke Jezebel, Joram, Ahaziah, and the whole posterity of Ahab.

While Jehu was holding a council of war with his fellow-officers at Ramoth-gilead, a young man burst into the room with wild look, dishevelled dress, and hasty stride. He was Elisha's messenger, come to anoint Jehu king. Unerringly singling out the young officer, he said, "I have an errand to thee, O captain." Taking him into another room, he anointed him, repeating in his ears the fateful words of the old prophecy. When Jehu returned to the other officers they inquired what the crazy fellow wanted. At first he strove to evade their question, but was at last forced to tell them

all. A frenzied enthusiasm seized them. It required but this single touch to crystallize into act the half-formed purposes already existing in their minds. They bear him on their shoulders out into the open air, and up the stairs to the top of the house. On the landing they pile together their military cloaks, extemporizing a throne. Upon it they place their hero and shout, "Long live King Jehu!"

He cuts off all communications between Ramoth-gilead and the outside world, that no news of the insurrection may reach the king. Then mounting his chariot, and attended only by a handful of determined soldiers, he makes a swift march to Jezreel, where his monarch, Joram, now convalescent, is entertaining his royal visitor and nephew, Ahaziah. He crosses the Jordan and sweeps like the wind up the broad green fork of the plain of Esdraelon, that leads straight to Jezreel. But he cannot cover his approach. Jezreel is on a hill which commands the whole view to the Jordan. A lookout from one of its pinnacles spies and announces the squadron's approach. Joram surmises that they are soldiers with news, perhaps of peace, from his own army. He despatches a horseman to meet them and inquire whether peace has been made. Jehu bids the messenger fall in behind. Another messenger comes upon the same errand, and is also retained. The cavalcade rapidly approaches, and now the lookout recognizes the headlong gallop of Jehu, the son of Nimshi.

Learning that Jehu heads the coming troop, Joram is sure that the war with Syria is over. He and Ahaziah both mount their chariots, and without a suspicion go out to meet the general. "Is it peace, Jehu?" cries the hopeful king. And the fierce words come back: "What peace, so long as the whoredoms of thy mother Jezebel and her witchcrafts are so many?" The terrible truth of Jehu's treachery flashes upon the king's mind. But it is too late. With a cry of horror

and of warning to Ahaziah he wheels his horses for flight, fully exposing his person to Jehu's unerring bow. The arrow pierces his heart, and he falls forward in his chariot, dead. This happened close to the plot of ground which Ahab, Joram's father, had stripped from Naboth. Jehu had overheard Elijah's foreboding words to Ahab upon that very spot, and ordered Joram's body to be left there unburied and dishonored. Though king of Judah, Ahaziah, too, had in him the blood of Ahab. A detachment from Jehu's force pursued him and gave him a mortal wound.

As Jehu approached the gate of Jezreel, the queen-mother, Jezebel, looked out of the window of her palace, which was upon the wall. She had painted her face and adorned her hair, not, like Cleopatra, with any hope of charming the victor, but in a spirit of fierce bravado. Referring to a former usurper, who after a reign of only seven days had burned the palace over his head and had perished in the flames, she cried out, "Had Zimri peace, who slew his master?" "Who is on my side?" called out Jehu. Two or three of her slaves appeared at the window, eager to do his bidding. "Throw her down," he shouted. They seize their helpless victim and fling her headlong. Her blood splashes the wall, and even the chariot. Jehu drives remorselessly over her crushed body, and leaves her to be devoured by dogs. Again Elijah's prophecy had its literal fulfilment.

Jehu was now master of Jezreel; but Samaria, the other capital of Israel, strongly fortified, was still loyal to the dynasty of Ahab. Here had been his seraglio, and here were living seventy of his sons, under the tutelage of the principal men of the city. Every one of these brothers of Joram would be a dangerous aspirant to the throne which Jehu coveted. They must be taken off at any cost. Jehu conceals his own weakness under a bold front. He challenges the rulers of Samaria to set up one of Ahab's sons as king and



meet him in battle. Panic-stricken at the proposal, they promise to do his bidding. He orders them to cut off the heads of the king's sons and bring them to him as bloody tokens of their loyalty. They obey, and heap up these ghastly trophies at the gate of Jezreel. Jehu, gazing with hypocritical horror upon his own work, strives to shirk the responsibility of his crime, saying, "I conspired against my master, and slew him; but who slew all these?"

On his triumphal march from Jezreel to Samaria the new king met a caravan of forty-two princes, brothers of Ahaziah. They were on their way from Jerusalem to Jezreel, intending to pay their respects to King Joram and the queen-mother, Jezebel. Suspecting no danger, they disclose their lineage and their errand. They were of Ahab's blood; and in order to fulfil Elijah's prophecy, as well as to cut off every possible competitor for the crown, he ordered them to be put to death.

Farther on he met Jehonadab, chief of a tribe of ascetics. To secure the sanction of his saintly character, he took this man into the chariot, and they proceed together, "the warrior in his coat-of-mail, the ascetic in his hair-cloth."

A Roman Emperor once wished that all Rome had but a single neck, that he might cut it off at one stroke. Jehu formed the purpose of alluring all the Baal-worshippers of the kingdom into one great trap, that he might destroy them at one blow. He gave out that he himself was a worshipper of Baal. "Ahab," said he, "served Baal a little; but Jehu shall serve him much." He proposed a great festival in the temple of Baal. All the worshippers of Jehovah were rigidly excluded. When all the idolaters had gathered and had been clad in sacred vestments, he gave his soldiers the order, "Go in, and slay them; let none come forth." It was done. The temple itself was then destroyed, and an end



put forever to the worship of Baal in Israel. Jehu did not, however, remove from Bethel and Dan the golden calves set up by Jeroboam as vile symbols of Jehovah. With all his zeal against idolatry, "he took no heed to walk in the law of the Lord God of Israel."

We turn away with relief from the massacre of Joram and Ahaziah, of Jezebel and the seventy sons of Joram, of Ahaziah's forty-two brothers and the multitude of priests and worshippers of Baal ; but "all scripture is given by inspiration of God, and is profitable for instruction in righteousness." So, having learned the story of Jehu, let us study, in the second place, his character.

Jehu had great executive ability. His fast driving was characteristic. He was impetuous, but not reckless. Having formed a purpose, he rushed to its realization. He brought things to pass. He combined energy with tenacity, and was capable of rapid decision. He was not so dominated by fixed notions that he could not speedily and silently retrace his steps when he found himself on the wrong path. Like Napoleon at Austerlitz, he knew the value of five minutes. He had a strong personal magnetism that coerced his associates into willing and even eager subservience. A true descendant of Jacob, he was versed in the science of dissimulation. He had the claws of a tiger, but they were muffled in velvet. His step was quick, but stealthy. He was not only rapid, but persistent. He never tired. His speedy pace was ceaseless, on and on. His deadly work did not stop half-way, but utterly extirpated the dynasty of Ahab and the worship of Baal.

But Jehu's character was stained by vindictiveness. The bloody *rôle* assigned to him by the Omnipotent was congenial to his nature. He was ready enough to obey God so long as the divine command fell in with his own ambitious and bloodthirsty passions. A man who wished the stones cleared

away from a little plot of ground once called together the boys of the neighborhood, and setting up a mark outside of his ground, proposed that all should throw stones at it. The stones were soon removed. How ready we are to do God's will when it happens to coincide with our own feelings! "We seize eagerly," says Goethe, "upon a law that will serve as a weapon to our passions."

Jehu was a kind of human tiger, and only too glad to have God use him as such. He had, indeed, a sense of destiny, like Napoleon or Stanley; but this destiny impelled him along the grooves of his own lust for rule and thirst for blood. His personal enemies,—the family of Ahab, which stood between him and the throne, the worshippers of Baal, who might cause his royal head to rest uneasy,—he went at them as if armed with a *firman* from the Almighty. He was like an executioner hacking his victim to pieces with fierce glee.

It was as if a Christian, moved by scripture precepts drawn from a far-away age and from a legal dispensation, should beat his child in anger. How different the spirit of a father whom I knew! After using the rod prayerfully, reluctantly, and even tenderly, he broke it up and threw it into the fire. Jehu was like some of the old divines, who seemed to preach hell with a gusto. We are by nature partisans, and think ourselves most exemplary Christians when we are fighting tooth and nail to build up a particular church in competition with other churches. A man is often full of zeal when he or his own faction is at the head. Reverse the situation, and his enthusiasm evaporates like the morning dew. Jehu is like a minister secretly rejoicing over the heresy of a successful rival and suddenly becoming valiant for the very phase of truth which his erring brother has slighted.

A traveller visiting Hadstock in England, writes: "The

church here, like the cathedrals of Worcester and Rochester, is said to have had the skins of sacrilegious Danes stretched on the doors; fragments under the nail-heads are found, on recent examination, to be portions of human skin." Jehu possessed the sort of religious zeal which led men to drive those nails. He had orthodoxy, without personal piety. His speech is full of cant. He was an unblest instrument of God, like Satan as described by Milton,

"His evil

Thou usest, and from thence creat'st more good."

Jehu's obedience was but formal,—not from the heart, not of faith, not unto salvation. He served God so far as it was to his interest, and then forsook him. He destroyed the dynasty of Ahab and the worship of Baal, for they stood in the way of his ambition; but he spared the golden calves, that they might help to preserve the unity of his kingdom. Let us not make the mistake of supposing our hearts pleasing to God because we do certain outward acts, however important, which accord with his command. Whether under the Old Covenant or now, love is the sole fulfilling of the law. "If I bestow all my goods to feed the poor, and if I give my body to be burned, but have not LOVE, it profiteth me nothing."

### Lesson III. April 19.

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## JONAH SENT TO NINEVEH.

*Jonah i: 1-17.*

BY REV. W. O. STEARNS, CAZENOVIA, N. Y.

#### I. JONAH'S FLIGHT.

THE prophet Jonah was contemporary with the Spartan lawgiver Lycurgus, being a child when Homer was singing to the Ionian lords and ladies of Achilles and his wrath. Nineveh was then at the height of its power. It was the oldest, largest, most wicked city of that age. Its circumference of "three days' journey" agrees with the statements of Strabo and the results of modern explorations. "Nineveh" meant both the particular city built by Nimrod and mentioned in Genesis x. 11, and a union of four primeval cities, including Nineveh proper. In the larger meaning of the word, Nineveh had an average length of twenty-five miles, and an average breadth of fifteen, with four minor cities in the corners, of which Nineveh proper was the largest. Truly it was "an exceeding great city." Yet was it great not so much on account of its size, as because of its importance in God's providence as the capital of the Gentile world.

Jonah's hesitation to obey the divine command was not, however, occasioned by Nineveh's importance in either sense. He was actuated by a narrow mind and an unevangelical heart. He would not become God's messenger to a country so hostile and so formidable to Israel. Like nearly all the Hebrews

then, he was puffed up by thoughts of Israel's magnificence after the conquests of Jeroboam II., the monarch who drove back the Syrians, captured Damascus, and recovered the whole country from Hamath to the Dead Sea. Ammon and Moab were now subdued, and the Trans-Jordanic tribes were restored to their homes from captivity. Jonah's prophetic activity was therefore contemporaneous with remarkable political successes, with the flood-tide of Israel's later-day fortunes. This influenced him. He was too thoroughly a mere citizen of the favored nation.

The fact that the mission was one of mercy and grace, under the circumstances heightened his distaste for it. How many times had it not been recorded touching Jehovah's enemies who had ceased to be such: "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil that he had said he would do unto them; and he did it not." Jonah's spirit was as ungenerous as that which actuated the elder brother in our Lord's parable. It was national exclusiveness, grudging to others the privileges which God had given to Israel, intensified by that so common form of selfishness which makes a man or a community enjoy the sense of distinction above others.

Not for Pharisees only did our Lord pronounce that parable. His own disciples needed it. Not until Peter had the vision at this very Joppa to which Jonah fled; not until Paul and Barnabas had been ordained to the special work of preaching to the Gentiles, and wonders and signs were accrediting their work; not until a council of the Church at Jerusalem had decided that uncircumcised men might through faith be pleasing to God, — did the Christian children of Israel fully understand that Jehovah is God of the Gentiles as well as of the Jews. The same spirit has, in fact, never wholly left the Church. Intolerance and exclusiveness, as displayed by Christians toward each other and toward unbelievers, are

among Satan's mightiest weapons. Manifestations of Jonah's temper are, alas! all about us even now.

Says Martin Luther: "Because Jonah was sorry that God was so kind, he would rather not preach. He would rather die than that the grace of God, which was the peculiar privilege of the people of Israel, should be communicated to the Gentiles also, who had neither the word of God, nor the laws of Moses, nor the worship of God, nor prophets, nor anything else, but rather strove against God and his word and his people."

Jonah fled from "the presence of the Lord," that is, from the Promised Land, where alone the Shekinah was supposed to dwell. Alone, weary, anxious, doubtless remorseful, he arrives at Joppa, and boards the first ship bound for a foreign port. This happened to be one about to clear for Tarshish, — probably a town in the south of Spain, — with a cargo of eastern manufactures to exchange for the silver, iron, tin, and lead of the far west. From the closest communion with his God, the renegade prophet hastens to where he believes no word from that God can reach him. Once on board the merchantman, he goes below, and fatigued by his hasty flight, falls into a deep sleep. The word describing this is the same as that used of Adam's slumber in the garden, and that from which Sisera never woke, — it was a profound stupor.

## II. JONAH'S PUNISHMENT.

The joy of the ship's company at weighing anchor was brief. Hardly were they out of port when, as Coverdale quaintly puts it, "the Lord hurled a great wynde into the sea." Sudden storms were common enough on that rocky coast. Josephus tells us that "the north wind opposes and beats upon the shore and dashes mighty waves against the rocks. . . . This wind," he adds, "is called by those that sail there 'the black north wind.'" Josephus's description of a

storm near the harbor of Joppa is paralleled by Jonah's, and it resembles that of another "tempestuous wind, called Euroclydon," which fell upon the ship carrying Paul to Rome. Modern sailors name such a storm a "Levanter," and testify to its exceeding severity.

The Hebrews were not ocean-goers. Their nautical terms are not numerous, and those used in this description are obscure. Nevertheless the account smacks of brine, just as it is redolent with personal experience. So terrible were wind and wave that the ship was thought to be "broken." The sea roared, and the billows heaved their foaming crests against the ship's devoted sides till she creaked and quivered under the blows. Terror-stricken, the mariners "cried every one to his god," like those in Shakspeare's "Tempest," "All lost! to prayers, to prayers! all lost!"

Jonah alone appears unconscious of danger. Even the captain's piercing wail, "Arise, call upon thy God, if so be that God will think upon us, that we perish not," seems hardly to have roused him. He still retained the careless self-security with which he had flung himself down, confident that once out of Israel, Jehovah would not take the trouble to pursue him. The restlessness of remorse had not yet come over him. His resolution to disobey had been so firm that conscience had well-nigh ceased to warn.

But Jonah soon appreciated the utter folly of his course. The increasing peril proved the uselessness of his prayers, and convinced him that he was the cause of the tempest. The seamen suspected this, and cast lots to discover if it was true. The lot fell on Jonah. Questions follow thick and fast: "What is thine occupation, thy country, thy people?"

When he replies, Jonah has come to himself. All the better part of his character stands forth. Dignified, manly, worthy of a servant and prophet of Jehovah, he answers, "A Hebrew am I; and I fear Jehovah, the God of heaven,



who hath made the sea and the dry land." The prophet is himself again, proclaiming Jehovah's name and power. To these heathen sailors in their terror he boldly declares Jehovah to be the true and sole God, ruler of the sea and of all lands, hating sin and worthy to be worshipped. In those terrible moments, as the great waves break across the deck and all expect instantly to be engulfed, while the shipmaster interrogates and the sailors alternately curse and pray, the guilty prophet gives himself back to his God, bravely using what few moments of life may remain in making amends for the past by the faithful preaching of Jehovah.

Nor is this the only or the clearest proof that Jonah has come to a better mind. He is determined that the crew shall not be lost on account of his transgression. "I will tell you," he says to those with him in the ship, "what you must do. Take me up, and cast me forth into the sea; so shall the sea be calm to you: for I know that for *my* sake this great tempest is upon you." Jonah will use no prevarication; he will not deny his disobedience. Such rebellion, he knows, deserves death. A believing Israelite, well acquainted with the severe justice of the Holy One as revealed both in the law and in the history of the nation, Jonah expects no other sentence. Fierce eyes are gazing into his very soul; a fiercer sea yawns at his side. No matter; Jonah will die, truly and justly.

Charles Reade vividly describes this scene. "Nobility begets nobility, and the partners of his peril could not bear to sacrifice a man in whom they saw no evil, but, on the contrary, justice, heroism, and self-sacrifice. The poor, honest fellows said, 'Anything but that,' and chose rather to be wrecked on shore. So they got out their long oars and made a gallant effort to row their trireme ashore, and there leave her bones, but save their own lives and that self-sacrificing hero. This was not to be. Sixty hands laboring at those oars could not prevail against the One Hand that hurled the



raging sea at that laboring galley and drove her from the land."

Seeing their effort futile, they cry to God, no more each to his own god. Most tender is their appeal. "We beseech thee, O Lord, we beseech thee, let us not perish for this man's life!" They beg that if Jonah is innocent his blood may not be laid to their charge. They had done what they could to learn the divine will. So, having prayed, they took up Jonah and cast him into the sea.

The history of Jonah's mission is thus far complete. We have traced its origin, we have followed its progress, we have witnessed its result. As that pale, submissive face disappeared beneath the waves, the storm ceased, and, as the Hebrew has it, "the sea *stood* from her raging." The rescued sailors offered sacrifices and paid their vows to the God of Israel's prophet, and sailed on in safety, we may trust, "to the haven where they would be."

### III. IS IT HISTORY?

Largely owing to the extraordinary character of the miracle by which Jehovah punished his disobedient servant, numberless theories have been advanced casting doubt on the historical character of this narrative. Without affirming that these sacrifice its value for religious uses, we ask: Does it read like a dream; does it seem like an historical allegory worked up with great skill and with the most extravagant license to the imagination? Is the shipmaster allegorical, or the seamen, the ship, the sea, the storm? Does the story read like Robinson Crusoe? Does it resemble a draft out of popular tradition, as if it were the Hebrew version of Andromeda, Hercules, or Saint George and the Dragon?

The mention of a prophet Jonah, the son of Amittai, in 2 Kings xiv. 25, the allusions in Tobit and Josephus to Jonah's visit to Nineveh, the belief of the Jews that the

story was an account of facts, and Jesus' reference to the repentance of the Ninevites, all point to the historical character of the book. As to internal evidence, if the miraculous incidents in it are to be regarded as indicating its allegorical character, nearly every historical book of the Bible must come into the same category. If the moral and spiritual suggestions of the story are to be regarded as evidence that it is allegorical, all biblical history which is morally instructive is to be esteemed not really history, but only religious instruction in parabolic form. Jesus refers to the central fact of the book, Jonah's mission to Nineveh, as historical. He mentions in the same way the miraculous preservation of the prophet in the belly of the fish. To the supernatural there can be neither greater nor less. Says Charles Reade: "Is this miracle a childish one? A rebellious servant was to be crushed into submission, yet not destroyed. He was to feel the brief agony of death by drowning, then to be laid in a horrible dark prison till he repented, then to be restored to the world in a fit state of mind to take a long journey and threaten the greatest city in the world. Now then invent your own miracle, and perhaps you will think very highly of that of the book of Jonah in comparison."

#### IV. LESSONS.

History or allegory, this experience of the prophet Jonah furnishes many rich spiritual lessons.

1. One is that religious privilege, even that of the closest personal relation to God, does not destroy man's will. It does not annihilate his power to rebel or otherwise transgress. We are "fearfully and wonderfully made;" and nowhere does this fact more impressively appear than in this awful ability to depart from God, spite of all his mercy and grace.

2. Jonah's fate also reveals the terrible special penalty of disobedience to the Eternal after having walked with him. Rebellion against the known commands of God is sure in any case to receive its due reward. "Every iniquity has its own voice at the judgment-seat of God." No law of nature is so unrelenting, so deadly rigorous in operation, as this: "The soul that sinneth, it shall die." But doubly, trebly bitter is the fate of those who from the very blaze of God's face are cast into the outer darkness.

3. Yet even in cases of such worst apostasy Jehovah loves the sinner, while hating the sin. What patience with the erring! God despairs of no one, not even of his recreant prophet or wicked Nineveh. Even that mighty hive of men, heathen, corrupt, defiled, lost, who have never heard his name save as that of an insignificant local deity, Jehovah cherishes, planning with infinite care to reach them with the message of eternal life. Our Father in heaven has not left himself without a witness in any human breast. The Ninevites are the objects of his love, though they know him not.

4. Both the animate and the inanimate creation are the ministers of God's love for men. The stars in their courses fight against Sisera. The storm brings Jonah to himself, and both him and his shipmates to God. The roaring sea receives and bears, but does not drown him. The monster of the deep is his vehicle, and not his grave.

5. How catholic, after all, is the spirit of the Old Testament! It is by no means a merely national book. The religion which it enshrines is for all men. It is evangelical. Jonah is sent to preach the gospel "to the regions beyond," and little as he loves the mission, cannot for a moment doubt that it is actually from Jehovah. How wonderful this! Had he not recognized in his heart the essential naturalness of the missionary mandate, had his religion, even as he apprehended

it, been as narrow, as strictly national, as his sympathies were, he would surely have suspected that the command to go and preach to Nineveh came from some demon, some deceiving spirit. Of such a thought his behavior and speech show no trace. The words, "Arise, go to Nineveh, that great city, and cry against it," he is no less ready to accept as from Jehovah than if they had bidden him raise his voice in favor of righteousness in Israel itself. Hebrew that he was, with all sorts of unclear ideas touching the relation of Jeohvah to mankind at large, he still somehow felt that the field of his nation's religion was the world. The first note of evangelical triumph, that the woman's seed should bruise the serpent's head, never once died from the air during all the long period of preparation for Messiah. Moses and David, Isaiah, Jonah, and "all the prophets" re-echo it, till at last He comes to fulfil it who, instead of saying, "Go to Nineveh," bade his apostles, "Go, disciple all the nations," assuring them that in consequence of their preaching, men should come from the north and from the south, from the east and from the west, and sit down with Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob in the kingdom of heaven.

## Lesson IV. April 26.

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# NINEVEH BROUGHT TO REPENTANCE.

*Jonah iii: 1-10.*

BY REV. JOHN H. MASON, NEW HAVEN, CONN.

JONAH was foolish, Jonah was wise: foolish to flee, wise to yield; foolish to expect to balk God, wise to learn so quickly his folly. "If a man would flee from God, let him flee to him," says the old Latin proverb. Jonah tried to escape God by flight from him. He found it insane. Misery, calamity, peril, and the sense of an ever-present God who had brought them, did their work; and the prophet, back again at the starting-point, heeds the divine voice, and turns with an obedient heart to fulfil the mission which he had thought to escape.

The history in the third chapter, brief as it is, sweeps a wide circle, for it touches upon God, — his sovereignty and his resources; his nature and its demands. It touches upon man, — his relation to God, his nature and its needs. It touches upon sin, upon repentance, upon forgiveness. Notice some of the lessons.

### I. GOD'S AUTHORITY.

"And the word of the Lord came unto Jonah the second time, saying, Arise, go unto Nineveh, that great city, and preach unto it the preaching that I bid thee." The Being who speaks is conscious of his right. He does not mince words. Here is no cautious approach, address, appeal, to propitiate the man and win the service desired. God

speaks to Jonah as a sovereign to a subject. "Do this because I wish it done; I am thy master."

It is interesting to note that God's demand upon Jonah now is precisely what it was in the first place. There is no effort to compromise because of Jonah's former flight, no paring down of the commission in hope that part may be accomplished, if not all. Far to the east, on the banks of the Tigris, is a great godless city, the capital of an empire. Sin has a stronghold within it, doom is sweeping down upon it. Time is short. A warning must be spoken. The city may be saved. The city is God's, though it may spurn his law. Jonah is God's, though Jonah has once disobeyed God's command. Now comes that command again, — plain, stern, uncompromising "Arise, go, preach."

The knife must have cut closer to the heart from the fact that while the same words were spoken, they contained no reference to the former disobedience. Yet the slight change of form in the expression seems full of meaning. "Arise, go, and preach the preaching that I bid thee." To Jonah these words meant more than reached the ear. "I told thee to go, and thou didst go the other way; now I tell thee, go and preach, — see that thou preach no other message than mine."

God owns men. All that we are, all that we have, all the service of our lives, belongs to God. We delude ourselves with any sense of self-ownership, forgetting him in whom all rights are vested. We search for clear titles and think we have found them. We bargain for the soil and say it is ours. We get the idea that we own what God only loans us; and when the real Owner takes it away, as he has a right to do, we too often rebel. Worst of all is the mistake of supposing that we own ourselves. By every conceivable consideration we are God's. Sovereignty is his. Men shall learn it beyond the grave if they will not learn it here.

## II. GOD'S WAY WITH THE DISOBEDIENT.

How is Nineveh to be warned? There is a man far off in Galilee who never saw Nineveh; Nineveh never heard of him. But he is the instrument which God chooses for the work. It seems like a strange choice, but God's ways are not as man's. A human instrument, though it may become the most useful, is the hardest kind of an instrument to fit to God's purposes, for in it is the element of human freedom. By virtue of that transcendent gift man may oppose himself to the Creator, who made him free. This is what Jonah did in the first instance. Yet Jonah is still the chosen instrument.

See how God goes to work to bring this man's will into subjection to his own. "Obedience," well says Carlyle, "is our universal duty and destiny; wherein whoso will not bend must break. Too early and too thoroughly we cannot be trained to know that Would in this world of ours is as mere zero to Should, and for the most part as the smallest of fractions even to Shall."

What a complex of world-wide, universe-wide, machinery the Sovereign of all can set in motion for the subduing of a human spirit! "Woe unto him that striveth with his Maker!" God's resources are infinite. The lightnings flash at God's call and say: "Here we are." The stars in their courses may fight against men. To break the proud will of Egypt's monarch, rivers run blood, cattle die, every green thing is eaten, thick darkness swallows the day. And when all this is not sufficient to subdue, Death stalks into every household, smiting the first-born and filling the land with wailing. Jonah is not more obdurate than Pharaoh. The storms, the seas, the worse tumults of his own bosom, the upbraidings of the crew, his thoughts of the past, his fear, — all are God's instruments, and under his direction each does its uncon-



scious part toward the subjection of Jonah and the salvation of the Assyrian capital.

Jonah is a changed man. From a coward he has become a dauntless hero and prophet. His will, yesterday rebellious, is to-day obedient. "So Jonah arose, and went unto Nineveh, according to the word of the Lord." His act is willing, straightforward, unhesitating. His purpose is at one with God's. The ways of God are never unnecessarily severe. Men who have to be taught obedience through these hard lessons are always those who can be no otherwise schooled; and they are often, in the end, the happiest. Blessed is the man who has learned these tough lessons well; he knows the joy of true liberty. The most thoroughly obedient servant of the heavenly Master, precisely he is the freest being in all this world. Jonah thought himself free when he fled; but in fact his first real enjoyment of freedom came when he started to fulfil God's command.

### III. GOD'S MISSIONARY MESSAGE AND ITS EFFECT.

Jonah was the first foreign missionary. The Old Testament is far from being a merely national or Jewish book. Adam was no Jew; nor was Enoch or Job or Melchizedek. Even Elijah, typical prophet, prototype of Jesus himself, is not known to have belonged to the chosen people; and if he did, it was one of the wild Trans-Jordanic tribes which claimed him. Further, selfish and narrow as Israel was prone to be, we find in its history numerous signs that it recognized its world-wide evangelic mission. Jonah's conviction is one of these signs; it is the most interesting feature of this prophecy. All that we have thus far considered had been going on, not for the sake of Jews, but that the men of far-off Nineveh might learn of God, his love and holiness.

The very heart of our conception of God as a moral being is his holiness. The holiness of God compels him to insist upon



holiness in all men as in all the rest of his rational creatures. Man's heart is by nature unholy, and the preaching of righteousness is needed everywhere. But in Nineveh sin had taken on its most frightful developments. A sad comment is it upon our poor human nature that just in proportion as men mass themselves in communities sin grows. The corrupt plague-spots of earth are its great cities ; there it is that sin breeds, vice lurks, crime hides. It is worst in those where wealth is most plentiful, and worst of all where, as in Nineveh and Rome, treasure has been piled up, not by industry, but by war.

Nineveh the queen of the East, Nineveh with its vast population, its lustrous name, its untold treasure, its countless resources, its history and its prestige, seemed to have everything which could make it strong. But Nineveh lacked just one element of fortune, — righteousness. Ah, fatal lack ! Crime ran riot in her streets. The rich ground the faces of the poor, and there was none to help. Nameless private vices, like those of modern Paris, honeycombed society both physically and morally. Nineveh's cup of iniquity was well-nigh full. A brief time more of unrepented sin, and the rod of divine fury must fall. Sharp and stern sounded the warning : " Yet forty days and Nineveh shall be overthrown." The king, the usurer, the rope-dancer, the harlot, hear, laugh, and then turn pale.

Jonah's preaching was plain, earnest, impressive, effective. All the experiences through which God had led the man since he fled to Tarshish would tend to make him earnest, but it required more than this to render his preaching effective. God went into the city with Jonah, but God had also gone before. The Spirit of God, which like the wind cometh and goeth no man can tell whence or whither, had preceded the prophet, preparing the hearts of the people for his message. God often uses, as it were, two hands in the accomplishment

of his work. With one he sends forth the Spirit, with the other he leads forth a man. And these two agencies, one divine and one human, work marvellously well together to mighty ends. Jonah did not consider how God was opening the hearts of that people for his message. He went to them simply because God bade him, and preached too mechanically what God told him to preach. Had he had proper faith, his course would have been easier.

The men of Nineveh were ready for the missionary. "The people of Nineveh believed God." To believe God is a great thing. Especially was it so for these people, who possessed no other revelation than that inner law whereof Paul tells us, which was written in their hearts. They knew much, however, even so. They were sure that there must be a Supreme Being; they conceived, feebly at any rate, his holiness, and knew that he condemned their sin. Stirred from on high, they believed the missionary's word that there was just one hope for them, — they must renounce their sins. Oh, that modern transgressors would hearken to Heaven's message thus readily! By a thousand channels sin is sweeping men to death, and repentance is the only way of escape. Prophets faithful as Jonah, and bearing commission from Jonah's God, incessantly cry to them that they are not safe; but they stop their ears.

The best possible evidence of the Ninevites' belief in the missionary's sermon was their conduct. They acted. They bestirred themselves as if they believed that the sin of their hearts and lives was endangering them. They proclaimed a fast. From greatest to least, they put on sackcloth. Most remarkable of all, the king joined in the general humiliation. His royal robe gave place to the garb of mourning. He came down from the throne and sat in ashes. He sent out a decree to cover beasts as well as men with sackcloth, commanding that a mighty cry go up to God for mercy, and that every

one turn from his evil way, in the hope that God might hear their prayers, forgive their sins, and save Nineveh. "Who can tell if God will turn and repent, and turn away from his fierce anger, that we perish not?"

This is not the common language of kings. Humility is not often a grace of royalty. It takes a great deal to humble a king. Defeat in war will sometimes do it. Death will sometimes do it. Augustus, dying, said to the friends about him: "What think ye of the comedy? Have I fairly played my part?" Alexander, dying, commanded that he should be borne to the grave with his hands outside the cere-cloths, so that people might see how empty they were. Charlemagne, on the other hand, wanted to be buried sitting on a marble throne, clad in his imperial robes, with his sword at his side, as if to keep up the hollow delusion of human power even beyond the grave. But the ringing cry of Jonah reaches even the royal palace, and the king, humbled, joins his subjects in their plea for God's mercy. Doom was descending. The vengeance of God and the sin of Nineveh were to come in conflict. Forty days, and all would be over. There was but one hope. The men of Nineveh, warned by God's prophet, roused by God's Spirit, and self-condemned, believed God. They turned from their sin and cried for mercy.

#### IV. GOD'S MERCY.

God's heart was moved; doom was averted; Nineveh was saved. "And God saw their works, that they turned from their evil way; and God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them; and he did it not." The mercy of God? how it shines like a sun through the dark cloud that was gathering over the devoted city! Indeed, we see mercy gleaming like a ray of sunshine all through this chapter. God was merciful to Jonah in following him through all his flight, in bringing him back to the starting-

point, in using him though he had shown himself unworthy, in making him a power for good to others. God was merciful to Nineveh in sending the messenger to warn the city, and in preparing the hearts of the people for the message. And now God is merciful in listening to their cry for forgiveness. His demands have been met. The people have humbled themselves and have turned from their sin. They shall not be destroyed. It is the crowning lesson of the chapter, of all Revelation, — the infinite mercy of God.

God repented. His attitude toward Nineveh was changed. What changed it? Nineveh's attitude toward sin. Nineveh, sunken in sin as she had been, being roused by the preaching of God's prophet, forsook her sin and turned from it. Then "God repented of the evil, that he had said that he would do unto them." What is meant by God's repentance? Speaking to man, God must use language with which man is familiar. If the Scripture tells us that the sun rises, we are not troubled by the statement, though we know that the sun stands still. When it says that God rested on the seventh day, we do not think of him as wearied, though rest commonly implies weariness. The Scripture speaks of God as "repenting," but it corrects any possible misunderstanding by hundreds of passages which tell us of his prescience, his wisdom, and his immutability. "Repentance" is a strong term. It means a changed attitude. The whole attitude of the Ninevites toward sin, and so, toward God, being changed, in that same hour God's attitude toward them was changed. God was not taken by surprise. The change in the people was just what he anticipated, — it was precisely what he had sent his prophet to secure; and he did not mean that his word should return to him void.

It may be asked, What did Jonah's prophecy mean? Was it prophecy at all? Was Jonah at fault in saying unconditionally that the city would fall, or did God err in having so

declared, and then failing to send destruction? Let no Christian's faith be shaken by these questions. The foretelling of coming events is an important function of prophecy, but it is not the whole of prophecy. Putting before men in an authoritative way certain great principles of truth and duty is another of its conspicuous offices. Nearly every prophet was much more a preacher and teacher than a seer. Jonah's denunciation, categorical indeed in form, was in fact conditional, and was so understood. "Destruction is coming as a penalty for sin unless you turn." It is evident that this was God's meaning, for he was quick to save when they had turned. That the Ninevites, too, saw in this prophecy not a final, unchangeable word of doom, but rather a threatened vengeance which repentance might avert, is clear from their conduct. Had they thought of it otherwise, why should they have ceased sinning? They knew little or nothing of any other-world judgment. Nor was there the slightest danger of deceiving them. Paradox and exaggeration are in Eastern speech the great means of emphasis and force.

It is an old story, this of Jonah, yet it teems with lessons even for us in this late afternoon of the nineteenth century. Let us learn that man belongs to God; that when God calls, man would better listen and obey; that God is holy, forever opposed to sin; that God is merciful, and in his love forever ready to receive and forgive the penitent.

"Our wills are ours, we know not how :  
Our wills are ours, to make them Thine."

## Lesson V. May 3.

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### ISRAEL OFTEN REPROVED.

*Amos iv: 4-13.*

BY REV. F. W. BAKEMAN, D.D., CHELSEA, MASS.

#### I. THE BOOK.

THE book of Amos seems to be a condensed summary of those prophetic discourses which by God's command the prophet had delivered against his idolatrous brethren of the northern kingdom. It naturally falls into three divisions. (1) Warnings and threatenings against certain surrounding nations (chapters i. and iii.). (2) Special warnings and threatened judgments against Israel, or the northern kingdom (chapters iii., vi.). (3) A series of prophetic visions, in which the seer beholds the sad fate of Israel, closing with a glowing picture of the restoration of David's kingdom in more than its pristine glory, to remain forever unshaken (chapters vii., ix.).

In style and conception the book is both poetic and oratorical. Many passages, of which the one now under consideration is a good example, show plainly that they are the substance of what was once delivered in the fervor of extemporaneous address. Throughout the book the imagery is original, bold, and forcible, but also very simple, drawn mostly from the prophet's own observations as a shepherd, in the free, wild life of the wilderness about Tekoa, in daily communion with Nature.

## II. THE MAN.

Amos was a native of Tekoa, a small fortified town built by Rehoboam for the defence of Judah, twelve miles south-east of Jerusalem and six miles from Bethlehem. It stood amid a desert country, dry and sandy, fit only for pasturage and the most simple kinds of husbandry. Amos lived in the reigns of Jeroboam II., king of Israel, and of Uzziah, king of Judah. As these were contemporary from 809 to 784 B. C., it must have been in the twenty-five years between these dates that our prophet accomplished his mission.

When Amos began his career the prophetic tide was rising to its height in the history of the Hebrew race. Joel was a little older, Hosea a little younger. Both were his contemporaries, while Isaiah and Jeremiah were soon to come upon the scene.

The occupation of Amos is described as that of a herdsman and cultivator of sycamore fruit. He speaks of himself as one who tended sheep. Whether he was a "hired man," or in a small way a cattle and sheep master on his own account, is unknown, though the latter is the more probable. He was not a man of the schools, neither was he connected with any prophetic family. He had received no special preparation for the exercise of his high calling. Yet he was by no means ignorant. The whole book shows large familiarity with the Scriptures. He had evidently been a careful student of the Pentateuch. If unacquainted with literature at large, he knew one book well.

Amos does not claim official distinction as a prophet, but he does assume prophetic authority, in that God has taken him from following the sheep and given him a special commission: "Go, prophesy unto my people Israel."

Amos was evidently one of those men whom God has often, in both ancient and modern times, called to special service



not so much for their professional as for their natural fitness. The native qualities of Amos, both moral and intellectual, were such as to atone and more for his lack of schooling. He was a layman whose endowments were so marked as to fit him for the exceedingly bold and difficult task which it pleased God to put upon him. God often finds his best instruments where we might not think of looking. He who took the lad David from his flocks in Bethlehem, only two leagues from the home of Amos, to make him a king, now calls another shepherd from the pastures of Tekoa to ordain him as a prophet. Both cases show that while culture is much, manhood is more; and it often happens that the former is much easier found than the latter.

Among the prophets Amos was what we might call a "free lance." He was hampered by no rules, subject to no official control, responsible to God alone. Freedom from conventional and traditional restraints gave him scope for a vigorous exercise of originality which more than compensates for lack of polish. He had that penetrating common-sense, that firm, practical grasp of moral distinctions, that rude but graphic and forcible speech, which distinguish men of power from those of mere culture. Rough and plain-spoken, austere, righteous in life, terrible in denunciation, without fear and without flattery, a child of the desert, Amos was true successor to that most unique and majestic of all the prophetic figures, Elijah the Tishbite, who had stirred Israel so mightily a hundred years before.

### III. THE OCCASION.

The call of God to Amos to prophesy against Israel at Bethel, Gilgal, and other seats of idolatrous worship, was a sharp test of the man. No duty could have seemed more forbidding. He was sent as a missionary, a preacher of righteousness, to prophesy terrible things to a people of his



own race, less than fifty miles from his own home. The humble shepherd was to face priests, lords, and prophets from the schools, to preach to a people drunken with prosperity and morally blinded by corruption.

Bethel was the chief seat of idol-worship. It was here that Jeroboam I., that son of Nebat "who made Israel to sin," had at the division of the kingdom set up the golden calves that the people need not go up to Jerusalem to worship. This was the beginning of that gross idolatry which was now the curse and was destined to be the ruin of Israel. Amos was called to prophesy at a time—the reign of Jeroboam II.—when the northern kingdom was in the highest tide of temporal prosperity known since the days of Solomon. Yet with all this outward pomp and glory, corrupt morals and daring irreligion were most shamelessly displayed. Luxury, licentiousness, dissolute habits, and cruel oppression of the poor were the natural concomitants of conscious power, security, and abundant wealth.

The religious instincts of the people were debauched by idolatrous practices. In spite, rather than in consequence, of the unexampled material prosperity, moral decay was striking deeper and deeper; religion grew more and more debased, and nameless wickedness among the higher classes prevailed like a distemper.

It was to a people in such a state, full-fed with wealth and power, wedded to a fascinating idolatry, proud and arrogant to the last degree, that Amos was called to deliver a message of warning and denunciation which even a Savonarola might have trembled to utter. Errand how unwelcome! To carry bad tidings is ever a sore burden; but to be charged with the duty of setting forth God's own doom of the obdurate and unbelieving, requires a supreme moral earnestness and self-forgetfulness very rare among men. What a task for the herdsman of Tekoa, to hold himself unflinchingly to

his divine mission, and in the burning words of this book to display the nation's sin and pronounce its impending fate! But Amos, unlike Jonah, meets the test bravely, and does not attempt to evade the Lord's call.

How caustic, truthful, terrible, his preaching must have been! How it pricked the consciences and roused the anger of the people, we may judge from the efforts of Amaziah, priest of Bethel, to have him banished. In his appeal to Jeroboam to interfere, Amaziah declares, "The land is not able to bear all his words," — not the only time in religious history when searching proclamation of the truth has proved irritating to wicked men.

#### IV. GOD'S MERCIFUL WARNINGS.

In prophetic vision, Amos has seen the storm of divine wrath rolling up, and hanging ominously over the nations surrounding Israel and Judah, — Damascus, Philistia, Tyre, Edom, Ammon, — and then gathering in one vast tempest of threatened destruction over the chosen people. The opening of this fourth chapter voices Jehovah's righteous indignation. It is a brief but sharp arraignment of the rich who grind the poor with their selfish exactions to gratify their luxurious tastes and depraved appetites. He then flashes upon them a glimpse of that terrible day when they shall be dragged into captivity like hooked fish hurried out of their home in the sea. Then the prophet indulges in a strain of keen and indignant sarcasm. The sight of their hypocritical attempt to keep up the rites of true religion, while offensively uniting them with idol-worship, made the prophet's blood boil. When he witnessed the zeal with which they brought their daily sacrifices to the altar, and the boastful ostentation wherewith they paraded their offerings, he broke forth in the name of Jehovah with burning indignation. "Go to Bethel and sin," he cries, in fine de-

rision, "to Gilgal, and sin still more; bring your sacrifices, present your offerings, make a show of your zeal in observing ancient rites: but all this will not atone for your open idolatries, or arrest the divine judgment."

Of course the prophet does not really wish them to go on in this mixed worship of Jehovah and idols. It is but his impressive and startling mode of warning them that the more they do it, the more certain will be their judgment. "Proceed if you will; but it is at your peril."

The prophet's tone changes. Irony gives place to sadness, reproach to expostulation. He bids them remember the severe chastisements which God has repeatedly employed to work their moral reformation. So far all seemed to have been in vain. The failure is made emphatic by that sad, wail-like refrain at the close of each judgment, into which infinite love and infinite regret seem to be condensed,— "*Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord.*"

And now Jehovah recounts and interprets these chastisements, that Israel may from the past be warned of the future. Often the memory of discipline long past, the significance of which has been explained by the years, works in us a more salutary benefit than a present one. While the Israelites have persisted in sin, God has been punishing them in love to save them from irretrievable ruin. The divine warnings have come to them in five or six special forms, — famine, drought, blight, pestilence and war, and the earthquake. God permits no room for doubt touching the purpose of these calamities, but rehearses and interprets them, that the people may be led to sober thought before it is too late.

The first judgment was famine. Nothing should have been more natural, when the earth withheld her increase, than to attribute this to him who giveth seed-time and harvest; yet they learned not famine's lesson. Then came

drought, — total failure of the latter rain, that fell two or three months before the harvest, the lack of which was fatal to all crops. Here and there, indeed, a kind Providence permitted moisture to gather, and the inhabitants of the parched and thirsty cities wandered, faint and eager, to the regions of rain. Yet Israel learned not the lesson of drought.

Next blew the heated simoom from the Eastern sands, scorching field and garden, — when, moreover, if aught was saved from the blight, it was at once devoured by the palmerworm. Yet they refused to learn the lesson of blight and locust.

Pestilence followed, — the curse peculiar to Egypt, from which God's people had been promised exemption if obedient. In close connection with this, war, in which the picked youth of Israel's armies were slaughtered, their decaying corpses poisoning the air with deadly stench. Yet Israel would not learn the lesson of pestilence and war.

Finally broke that mysterious and unnamed calamity, whose frightful possibilities of evil brought to mind the overthrow of Sodom and Gomorrah. Whether this was earthquake, conflagration, or lightning, cannot be known. We are only assured that from it the mercy of God saved them as brands from the burning. But to the lesson from even this combination of threat and mercy they had not listened. God's warnings had been in vain.

#### V. THE DIVINE ULTIMATUM.

Something far more terrible yet is in store, soon to befall the guilty nation; and for this, Jehovah now solemnly bids them prepare. It is the divine ultimatum, — God's last word before doom. Even this, indeed, is the alarm of love. God says, *Prepare*, make ready, put yourselves in proper attitude, — not necessarily as criminals for sentence, but if you will, as penitents for clemency. Mark Jehovah's significant

expression, "*Therefore*," because of your impenitence and hardness of heart, "*thus* will I do unto thee, O Israel." But what is it that God will do? Ah! that dreadful word is left unuttered. He will not now disclose their fate. It must be something more fearful than aught that has gone before. The silence, the unwillingness to voice it, make the conception of what this secret, unspeakable judgment may be, all the more terrifying.

This final appeal of divine compassion is rendered more impressive by the prophet's sublime characterization of Jehovah as a Being of supreme power, wisdom, and glory. He would have them know that it is no idol-god who urges reform, but the Almighty, the Omniscient, the Maker of the universe, he who has framed the earth and fashioned the mountains; who has created the invisible winds to do his bidding; who knows the secret thoughts of men, and searches all hearts; who maketh the light darkness, or the darkness light; who is exalted above all that is loftiest on earth, so that the mightiest are subject to his sovereign will and power. Such a Being must Israel prepare to meet for final account.

Yet were ever power and mercy more touchingly or impressively conjoined? The Almighty God pleads! Well might he say, "All day long I have stretched forth my hands unto a disobedient and gainsaying people." It is among the most beautiful of all the pictures of merciful love in that wondrous Old Testament gallery. In such ineffable compassion does the merciful God pronounce his final word.

#### VI. LESSONS.

1. The most offensive kind of irreligion in the sight of God is that counterfeit religiosity which under the hypocritical guise of zeal for God's service "borrows the livery of heaven in which to serve the devil." Sacred rites and

unholy acts joined together make up the most horrible mockery of religion which it is possible to conceive.

2. God has made it forever clear that he will not accept a divided heart and service. Elijah's word to the prophets of Baal declares God's mind. "If the Lord be God, follow Him; but if Baal, then follow him." And Christ re-affirms the principle in New Testament phraseology when he says, "Ye cannot serve God and Mammon."

3. Natural calamities are voices of God calling for national reform. Yet sin makes men such dull learners of divine providences that God has to set them many lessons to teach them a little.

4. God's most severe discipline, according to his own interpretation, has mercy as its motive, and salvation as its end. God's messages of warning to sinners are always of double significance, — warning and mercy; the warnings being always for the sake and in the interest of mercy.

5. We see the inevitableness of divine punishment for the finally incorrigible. God's justice must hold the ultimate retribution as steadily in view as his mercy does the possibility of reform. In the dealing of God with Israel all is condensed as to significance into that one expression of the apostle, "Behold the goodness and the severity of God."

6. This whole passage is a wonderful manifestation of the patience and forbearance of God. What a volume of unexpressed but suggested pathos lies in those oft-repeated words, "Yet have ye not returned unto me, saith the Lord." They have a solemn and ominous ring, like the boom of a bell in the midnight hour. How surcharged with meaning is that small word "yet!" All the sad history of God's ineffectual efforts to warn Israel into a realization of their impending ruin, like the yearning of a father for the return of wayward children, seems to be gathered up into that mournful sentence of a mighty but disappointed love. But think how over-

whelming also is the indictment of these words against Israel! They sum up in one heavily laden expression God's love, anxiety, and mercy on the one hand, and on the other Israel's persistent obduracy, which has made that unhappy people the standing illustration of history in proof that "the way of the transgressor is hard."

Lesson VI. May 10.

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ISRAEL'S OVERTHROW FORETOLD.

*Amos viii: 1-14.*

BY REV. D. F. ESTES, HOLDEN, MASS.

THIS prophecy is a vision and a voice out of the kingdom of Israel eight hundred years before Christ. That country was then far advanced in its second hundred years of independent national life. Since the glories of David's and Solomon's undivided realm had vanished, disaster and disgrace had by contrast not seldom brightened their memory. Now, however, under the second Jeroboam, the greatest and most successful not only of the dynasty of Jehu, but of all the monarchs of Israel, its armies have been everywhere victorious, its enemies humiliated, its borders enlarged, and its wealth greatly increased. At home the nation appeared to the eye of its citizens to possess every needed element of stability and prosperity, in a strong government, domestic tranquillity, plentiful harvests, and multiplying riches. Looking abroad, there appeared no occasion for anxiety. Judah, the twin kingdom, had come off the worse in its last war. Severe defeats had repaid Syria for her former triumphs. Egypt was exerting no great influence on national politics. The shadow of Assyria was only just beginning to fall westward, where her foot should soon be so heavily set. Seemingly Israel might aspire even to be mistress of the world as



hopefully as Nineveh or Babylon or the village of a few huts which perhaps already clustered where Rome should one day stand.

But along with apparent political and economic prosperity, sad religious and moral corruption prevailed. Apostasy had accompanied revolution when Israel was founded. For the Formless Presence in shining cloud behind the veil of the Temple at Jerusalem, royal decree substituted the golden calves at Bethel. This break alike in place, in unity, and in form of religious observance shook the hold of religion itself upon the people, and prepared them for lapses at once frequent and gross into the worst of idolatry. Still other sins had followed in the train of apostasy. Dishonesty and debauchery were the natural results of material prosperity, and increase in wealth and luxury was uncontrolled by religious sentiment and principle. As a poet has paraphrased the denunciations of another prophet, —

“Israel dealt in robbery and wrong;  
There were the scorner’s and the slanderer’s tongue;  
Oaths, used as playthings or convenient tools,  
As interest biassed knaves or fashion fools;  
Adultery, neighing at his neighbor’s door;  
Oppression, laboring hard to grind the poor;  
The partial balance and deceitful weight.”

To this people, victorious, prosperous, wealthy, avaricious, dishonest, luxurious, corrupt, immoral, irreligious, God sent a messenger with a message. In Judæa, near Hebron, at Tekoa, a little village, scarce more than a group of tents, from which went forth with their flocks the keepers of the little fine-wooled sheep of the region, dwelt Amos, a “flock-master,” who was as well, when opportunity served, a gatherer of the fruit of the sycamore-tree. He has been called a “poor peasant” and “unlettered.” The region of Tekoa would give little chance to amass wealth; but it will not do to count him

ignorant or unintelligent. He may have known as much of books and of writing as David, another shepherd lad, and surely from Nature and from men and from God's Spirit he had learned much. Few Hebrew authors — and that means few authors in any literature — can so read the eternally true in the familiar, finding lessons rich and practical in what had been the sights of everyday life, — the basket of summer fruit, the multiplying locusts, the battle of the shepherd with the lion ; and few express their thoughts in a manner at once so graphic and so terse, so combining both force and finish.

Having received his message from Jehovah, Amos goes from Tekoa, his humble home in Judah, to Bethel, the royal sanctuary and royal abode of Israel. Here he denounces the sins of the nation, proclaims the displeasure of Jehovah, and threatens destruction. Tradition reports that the fearless preacher was mobbed and beaten, scarce escaping with his life. But he had done his work ; he had warned the people at large ; and even King Jeroboam, whom he could not directly approach, had heard his message through the priest of Bethel. At some time, doubtless in quiet after years in Tekoa, he wrote out the denunciations and warnings of his brief ministry ; and thus its power has been extended all over the world, and has already endured more centuries than it may have lasted weeks at Bethel.

The vision and the voice come down to us to-day. To us from the printed page Amos is telling what he saw and what it meant. "Behold," he says, "a basket of summer fruit." The relation of this sight to the present condition and future woe of Israel is not directly explained by the prophet, and to us it does not lie on the surface. Only as we dwell upon it does its original suggestiveness in some measure return. In Palestine fruit was the last crop to be gathered in. As when a New England farmer sees the last roots stored away, the sight is to him a sure token that the

year has run its course, and that nothing more is to be expected from the fields, now fast growing brown, so the sight of fruit suggested to Amos, the mention of it suggested to his hearers and first readers, that the end of the prosperity of Israel was near. Additional force was given to this suggestion by a play upon words which we can in no way reproduce in English. The word here used for "fruit" was derived from the same root as the word which commonly signified "end." Hence the word doubly brought to the mind the thought that whatever was referred to was in its last days, and almost done and done with. The basket of fruit could mean to one who lived in Palestine and spoke Hebrew, only what Amos goes on to declare, "The end is come upon my people Israel;" and it meant this as much more clearly and strongly than the commentary which accompanied it, as the vision is always clearer and stronger than the voice.

The significance was of course primarily political. No nation could long stand which was so undermined with irreligion and honeycombed with immorality as was the nation of Israel. To be sure it seemed prosperous, it seemed to be ripening into established strength and vigor. To him who saw clearly and far, to the prophet who saw with eye divinely aided to penetrate show and sham and to perceive the real and the true, the apparent ripening of Israel was only incipient decay. The bloom of outward prosperity could not hide the rot at the heart. Israel was doomed, and speedily. Its very triumphs showed that the end was near, for they brought it near. The glory in which king and people alike delighted, the pomp and pride of general luxury, the ostentation of the wealthy, the glittering success of the schemes of the would-be wealthy, — Amos, though only a travel-worn sycamore-gatherer of Judah, a plain man with a plain message, saw it all to be no more than the last

fruits which could be gathered, a sure harbinger of speedy decay.

Like a summer storm clouding the noon, disaster soon overshadowed the brightness of Israel's day. Jeroboam left an heir to his crown, but none to his greatness. Murderous usurper followed usurper on the throne of Jehu's line. Defeated armies, narrowing borders, lessening strength in money and in men, weakness at home, humiliation abroad, prepared the way for the Assyrians to subdue the nation and to crush it out of existence forever. Less than a hundred years after Amos came to Bethel, and was scorned and hunted thence, Shalmanezzer came, and Israel was no more.

Now it is to be remembered that the destruction of the national life of Israel was due to itself, its own faults, its own corruptions. It was due, not to the strength of Assyria, but to the weakness of Israel. No nation was ever destroyed from without. A people that is fit to live cannot be made to die. No might can crush a nation that is strong in itself. All the might of Syria could not crush the Maccabees, nor Austria the Swiss, nor Spain the Dutch, nor the Turks Greece. When the wave of Assyrian conquest had swept Israel clean out of existence, Judah still endured. Idolatry and irreligion, luxury and debauchery, public corruption and private dishonor had ruined and spoiled Israel; and the Assyrians only made an end of the fruit that was already rotten as well as ripe.

Here is a lesson which is still important for all lands and for our own land. We may well stop to bethink ourselves that our prosperity is no certain token of our permanence. We are well advanced toward our second national centennial. So was Israel when Amos spoke. But Israel never saw its third. We boast of our immense territory, of our multiplying population, of our increasing wealth. Size is not certain strength, numbers and riches are not certain strength. The empire of Alexander fell to pieces by its own weight. Spain

was ruined by its riches. Multiply our territory, our population, and our wealth by three, and you might thereby divide our power by three, — yes, by nine. If to have more citizens we must admit worse citizens; if the public service shall be party-spoil, and office shall go to the highest bidder; if bribery, fraud, or force makes void the will of the people; if corporate monopolies dictate laws, and lobbies attend to the enactment of them; if public and private corruption saps the morality of the people, while ignorant superstition, blasphemous atheism, or irreligious indifferentism undermines the foundations of our national existence, then the day is not far distant when it shall be said of the United States, “Behold a basket of summer fruit! The end is come upon the people; I will not pass by them any more,” and we shall speedily go to the charnel-house of nations, where Turkey will soon lie down forever with the empire which preceded it at Constantinople, and with Rome and Greece and Persia and Egypt and Babylon and Nineveh and Israel.

Our chapter points with special warning at one particular class of corrupting influences, — those which grow out of the greed of gain. Wealth may be an especial and pre-eminent source of social weakness. The dangers which beset the fabric of society in these days link themselves very largely with the production, accumulation, and distribution of wealth.

“Ill fares the land, to hastening ills a prey,  
Where wealth accumulates and men decay.”

Thus Israel proved it. Her great ones grew greater by crushing the poor beneath them. To be sure, estates and fortunes increased, and their possessors were lifted into greater honor; but as an iceberg for every foot which it towers higher into the sunlight sinks nine feet deeper into the unsunned depths of ocean, so the enlarged estates of the Israelitish magnates rested on intensified poverty and suffering among the Israelitish peasants.

The denunciations of Amos illuminate with wonderful clearness the unjust and dishonest practices which had become prevalent in that day. The poor man was cheated with false weights, alike when he marketed his produce and when he received his pay. The refuse of the wheat was fraudulently sold for food. Such distress prevailed, and such advantage was taken of it, that the needy was compelled to sell himself into slavery for a pair of sandals. The consequences of this greed fell on individuals as well as on the nation. In the disaster which overwhelmed the whole people the rich and great whose practices had caused it shared, and their fortunes went down in the universal crash. When the invaders came, the rich man had no immunity or advantage. He was rather marked for special ignominy and suffering. Terrible indeed was the calamity which fell on the grandees of Israel. We get some suggestion of it in the words of the prophet, mighty in their fewness, interrupting the far-echoing music of the false worship: "In that day the temple songs shall wail. Many corpses everywhere! Cast them out! Hush!" All was fulfilled. Disaster, impoverishment, affliction, death, smote the rich ones and the great ones of Israel when the Assyrian deluge rolled over the hill-tops of Ephraim.

Here is a lesson which we as citizens need to consider. Greed, dishonesty, haste to be rich, may destroy the fabric of our society. While some have been amassing great fortunes at one extreme of the social scale, even granting that the standard of general comfort has risen, there has also been deepening distress of bitter poverty at the other extreme. There are shining examples of business integrity in every city; there are men in every town as worthy to shine, because their dealings are as honorable: but where are there lacking those whose knavish dishonesty is curbed only by fear of the law, — too lax in its provisions, and laxer yet in

its enforcement? Talk about selling the refuse of the wheat! What is not now adulterated, and that with poisons? Tax-dodging has become a fine art, and perjury in business affidavits too common for comment. Speculation even in the necessities of life has grown, beyond a wrong to individuals and classes, to be a menace to our national prosperity. What will be the result? If the growth of vast fortunes and estates is regarded with popular and legislative favor, and government and society and church are deaf to the cries and indifferent to the struggles of honest poverty, sinking deeper into abject and hopeless pauperism; if ostentation, luxury, and extravagance replace our old-time simplicity, frugality, and economy; if the craze to be speedily immensely rich fevers the blood of the whole people; if fraud, illegal or legalized, if gambling in lotteries and in futures, if corners and stock-watering, if dishonesty, in short, in all its forms, continues to increase; if thus such sins as ruined Israel taint our business and social life ever deeper and deeper, — then the basket of summer fruit will become symbol as apt for us as it was for them; the end cannot be far off.

The end may not come, to be sure, in a political catastrophe of subjugation by a foreign conqueror. It came not thus to France a century ago, when the social fabric was overturned, and the wrongs of ages were visited on the men and women of that day. We too may see revolution, riot, anarchy, sweeping away fortunes, levelling distinctions, deluging the nation and the nations with disorder and destruction. God grant that this be not the end; that rather honor and honesty, uprightness and morality, brotherly love and mutual helpfulness, may prevail, and that thus our social system may continually grow fairer and stronger.

We have looked far away at vices which are widely prevalent, at influences which work on a large scale, at conse-



quences which it takes countries and centuries to exemplify ; but there is warning for individuals as well as for nations.

Learn to distrust even the prosperity which seems the greatest, and carefully to scrutinize its cost and its consequences.

“ This is the state of man : to-day he puts forth  
The tender leaves of hope ; to morrow blossoms,  
And bears his blushing honors thick upon him ;  
The third day comes a frost, a killing frost,  
And, — when he thinks, good easy man, full surely  
His greatness is a ripening, — nips his root,  
And then he falls.”

These words Shakspeare puts into the mouth of Wolsey when he found his ripest and richest honors to be but a dish of summer fruit, decaying in his hand.

We shall do well to heed also the advice which the poet makes Wolsey give : —

“ Love thyself last : cherish those hearts that hate thee :  
Corruption wins not more than honesty.  
Still in thy right hand carry gentle peace,  
To silence envious tongues : be just, and fear not.  
Let all the ends thou aim'st at be thy country's,  
Thy God's, and truth's : then, if thou fall'st, . . .  
Thou fall'st a blessed martyr.”

Such virtues we each in his place may make our own ; and then life cannot be a failure, and we shall have done our part to make not ourselves only, but our country, fit for prosperity which may permanently endure.

To seek first to be right, then to seek to prosper, — not first to prosper, regardless of right, — is as important for the soul as for the nation. Let us each lay the corner-stone of our life work in the fear of God and in Christian faith, and rear the edifice in honesty, morality, kindness, and service. Then surely ours shall be “ the blessing of the Lord ; it maketh rich, and he addeth no sorrow with it.”



## Lesson VII. May 17.

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### SIN THE CAUSE OF SORROW.

*Hosea x: 1-15.*

BY REV. THOMAS D. ANDERSON, PROVIDENCE, R. I.

IT is a long period of the history of Israel which passes under the eye of Hosea. Entering on his career in the reign of Jeroboam II., he sees the kingdom at the height of its splendor. It has extended until it has reached the limits of the kingdom of Solomon. It sways the people on the east of the Jordan, and counts Damascus among its tributaries. At this time Samaria sits, "a crown of pride on the head of the fat valleys." Soon, however, the kingdom is rent by factions, and under weak rulers is bereft of her dependencies, until the "glorious beauty is a fading flower." And before the prophet is gathered to his fathers in the reign of Hezekiah, this same Samaria, the crown of Israel's pride, is cowering alone before the "overflowing scourge" of Assyria, and bowing to the doom which the prophet, with no special keenness of vision, is now able to foresee.

Why this decline among a people which has had so remarkable a history? What has the prophet to say by way of explanation? To this problem he addresses himself, with his strong faith in things unseen, spiritual, eternal. These eternal things are realities. They must be taken into the account. They alone are permanent, and only that which is based on them shall remain. "The grass withereth, the flower fadeth, but the word of our God shall stand for ever." This is the

moral axiom with which the prophet starts. But this "word" has been disregarded, contemned. "The people have asked counsel at their stocks, and their staff has declared unto them, and they have left off to take heed to the Lord." Therefore are these people like "a flower of the field, for the wind passeth over it, and it is gone." It is because of their disregard of eternal things, because of their defection, not so much from Judah as from Judah's God, that they have experienced so sad a decline in their national history. It is their sin which is the cause of their sorrow.

This is the teaching which the prophet would impress on the people of Israel; this is the principle he would establish in the passage before us. There is a connection between sin and sorrow, between wickedness and calamity, — yes, between moral transgression and physical, social, political disaster. We may define sin negatively as impiety, iniquity, unspirituality; but he speaks of it as a positive aggressive force, inflicting injury on the heart of the individual transgressor, and infecting also the external condition of the people. It "sets on fire the course of nature."

In so emphasizing the influence of sin on external conditions, and in dealing so exclusively with its visible results, the prophet teaches a profound truth, but not the whole truth. There are other results of sin than those which appeal to the eye and which may be estimated in the market-place. In the light of a fuller revelation, and with a keener, more profound moral insight, Jesus teaches that sin works, and works disaster, even when the external condition is prosperous, and all that appears is respectable. Moral transgression is always followed by moral punishment, though physical disaster may be evaded so long as physical laws are obeyed. The immoral man who obeys physical laws may expect physical prosperity, but he will not escape the wrong he has done to his own soul. In the sleek, prosperous, and highly re-

spected Pharisee, no less than in the humble workman doomed to be crushed beneath the tower of Siloam, the moral law is working out its sanctions, and whatever the man's physical condition may be, the end will be moral disaster,—unless he repents. The connection between moral transgression and physical disaster is not constant and necessary. This caution Jesus is careful to give to students of the Hebrew prophets. We cannot always from the physical condition infer the moral character; but still, the teaching of the prophet is true, that moral character has a determining influence on physical condition, that as matter of fact sin reaps its harvest of sorrow, and wickedness brings disaster in its train. The moral nature in time shows the result of the injuries which it has received, and the heart which is opposed to God and transgresses his moral law will be liable in its headstrong course to transgress his physical laws, and thus incur physical disaster.

It is this truth, solemn and impressive, even though partial and inadequate, which the prophet uses in order to arouse a people enervated by luxury and emasculated by selfish indulgence. They turn away from the spiritual teacher; they may, perhaps, listen to the social philosopher who sets forth the economic folly of unspiritual living.

The prophet begins with a reference to Israel's condition as blessed by God. "Israel is a luxuriant vine." But he is "found guilty;" "according to the multitude of his fruit he has increased his altars." Here, then, is the prophet's first charge against Israel on account of their sin.

*It perverts prosperity.* Prosperity itself is not sinful; it is a blessing which God promises to give, and which his people should seek to secure. It is far from the thought of the Hebrew prophet that misery is the normal condition of the servant of Jehovah. Jehovah delivers from Egypt; Jehovah establishes Israel in the promised land; Jehovah drives away

the enemies of his people, and crowns the lives of his chosen with loving-kindness and tender mercies. The inducement to obey God, to be faithful to Jehovah, is found in the reward he gives. He "shows mercy unto thousands of those who love him and keep his commandments." "Happy is that people whose God is the Lord."

But sin perverts prosperity. It allows the material to eclipse the spiritual. With attention entirely engrossed in its present material condition, the soul becomes spiritually near-sighted, it "cannot see afar off." Luxuriating in the comforts of prosperity, greedily appropriating the "bread which perishes," it smothers the deeper yearnings of the soul for the "words which proceed out of the mouth of God." Like the man in the tropics who, abundantly provided for through the bounty of nature, restricts his desires to that which may be readily obtained, and fails to develop himself by more strenuous efforts after nobler ends, the sinner seeks to satisfy himself with the pleasures of sensuous enjoyment or of selfish ambition, and forgets his noble destiny as a child of God; he sells his birthright for a mess of pottage.

Again, sin perverts prosperity in failing to use it for the noblest ends. It fails to take account of the latent force of prosperity; it does not appreciate its value. Value is relative. The value of one thing is read in terms of another. The land is worth a thousand dollars. The picture is worth the time and pains expended by the artist. Ultimate value, however, must be read in terms of life. A thing has true value only as it ministers to life, may be transmuted into life. Prosperity, then, is to be valued as a condition of life, as a means of ministering to life more abundant. How great its transmutable value is, we do not realize until we conceive, with Jesus, how treasure on earth may be transmuted into treasure in heaven, the mammon of unrighteousness into friends in everlasting habitations. But this conception we

shall gain only as, with Jesus, we see prosperity in spiritual relations. If our physical circumstance is not traced to a spiritual source, it will not be subordinated to a spiritual end. Here we discover the fault of Israel. "According to the goodness of their land, they made goodly images." Why? Because the idol was worshipped as the source of blessing, and therefore the idol was honored by the offerings of those who were blessed. In the worship of the calf the spiritualism of the Hebrew religion was corrupted by naturalism. And just in proportion as men fail to see character back of property, God back of possessions, do they find their ideal, their motive, their inspiration in those "things which perish with the using," and cheat themselves out of "an inheritance incorruptible, undefiled, and which fadeth not away."

Having shown how even the general prosperity of a community is perverted by sin, the prophet gives still more specific illustrations of his theme as he traces the influence of sin on social institutions, and considers its effect on religion, on government, on society at large.

*It destroys religion*, and takes away its inspiration. "The inhabitants of Samaria shall mourn over the calves of Beth-aven, and the priests thereof, because the glory is departed." Sin does not at once do away with religion. It would fashion religion to its liking; but in this transformation the essence of religion evaporates. So it was at least in Israel. "Feasts, new moons, sabbaths, and solemn observances" were still celebrated. But all this is external, it is customary, it is too often perfunctory. In perfunctory religion there is nothing to take hold of and mould the man. There is no meditation on high truths, there is no aspiration after noble ideals, there is no endeavor to realize holy purposes and to execute righteous deeds. The knees may bend, the head may bow, the blood of the victim may flow, and its body be

burned in sacrifice ; but the mind is not awakened, the heart is not stirred, the man is not inspired. There is no religious enthusiasm kindling the fires of devotion, there is no religious sentiment making new heroes in defence of their altars. For when a nation fails to honor character more than condition, to exalt eternal verities above temporary advantage, to heed the pealing tones of the eternal moral law rather than the siren notes of fickle circumstance, — in a word, to place the service of God above the service of self, — then the noble earnestness of religious enthusiasm is lost, the throne receives no help from the sanctuary, the altars call forth no heroic devotion in their own defence, and the people readily succumb to any strong invader. “The thorn and the thistle shall come up on their altars, and they shall say to the mountains, Cover us, and to the hills, Fall on us.” A calf, the work of man’s hands, cannot defend a nation, and “it shall be carried to Assyria for a present.” “The high-places also of Aven, the sin of Israel, shall be destroyed.”

Turning his attention from the religious to the political consequences of sin, the prophet teaches that, —

*It invalidates government.* There is profound pathos in the cry of the people : “We have no king, for we fear not the Lord ; and the king, what can he do for us ?” The deepest conditions of national prosperity are not of man’s creation, not determined by human legislators. Nations rise and fall. They come to the zenith of their greatness and decline. Their successors study their history, investigate the conditions of their greatness, the causes of their decline, and learn that even in spite of legislation, in spite of desperate struggles, sometimes heroic though misdirected, the nations were influenced by currents and tendencies which they did not set in motion, and which they were incompetent entirely to control. These movements — tendencies, as they are called in modern terminology — are by the deep in-

sight of the Hebrew prophet conceived as the personal activity of Jehovah. There is an eternal plan, there is a holy and gracious purpose; and for the perfection of this plan, the consummation of this purpose, the power of the Almighty comes into operation. This power rolls in as a mighty flood; and if any human potentate, insolent in his sin, determines to resist its onward flow, that "king is cut off as foam" — or, better, as a chip, or a broken twig — "upon the water."

The political intercourse of men is conditioned on eternal principles of right, and nations as well as men must act in truth. We must "speak truth, for we are members one of another." When a nation thinks that it may pass "words" which have no sterling value, — when in its representative it speaks "vain words, swearing falsely in making covenants," — it needs to learn that, in this universe of God, truth is final arbiter. If lying words have been sown, "judgments will spring up like hemlock [or darnel] in the furrows of the field." That which finally brought the Assyrian conqueror against the capital of Israel was the discovery that Samaria was breaking faith with him and carrying on secret negotiations with the king of Egypt. God has so constituted society that lying words produce a harvest of judgments, and in the mighty movement of God's eternal purpose an iniquitous king is whisked away as easily as the freshet carries off the twig broken from the decaying tree. "The nation and kingdom that will not serve thee shall perish; yea, those nations shall be utterly wasted." So speaks the ancient prophet; so speaks the modern historian.

Yet once more the prophet gives illustration of the bane of sin.

*It emasculates society.* "Ephraim shall receive shame, and Israel shall be ashamed of his own counsel." It is a pitiable



picture which Amos and Hosea paint of society in Samaria. Appetite reigns, drunkenness abounds, licentiousness and cruelty follow in the train. "Even as they did not like to retain God in their knowledge, God gave them over to a reprobate mind, to do those things which are not convenient." The very indulgence which sin practises defeats its own object. The fibre of the muscle is relaxed, the vigor of the mind is gone; patience, courage, hope, have fled with faith; and the people lie supine, weak, inert.

"Where there is no vision, the people perish." Banish the unseen from the mind, discard the demands of righteousness, deny the ideals of religion, and deaden the sense of obligation; let man cease to regard himself as a son of God, and his fellow-man as a brother, — and manhood is robbed of its glory, the home of its joy, and society of its security and peace. Is the picture too black? It represents the final eclipse. Thank God, this has never taken place; but let us heed the warning given in the dark penumbra cast upon the earth in Samaria at the time of the Captivity, in Rome at the time of the barbarian invasions, in Europe amid the degradation of the tenth century, and in France amid the horrors of the French Revolution. Efface the great truths of righteousness and love, as sin seeks to efface them, and man is transformed into a devil, and society becomes a hell. The emasculation is complete. Manhood is eliminated; the brute alone remains.

The prophet has taught his lesson: sin works disaster; and this is true though the final result may be delayed. "The battle in Gibeah against the children of iniquity did not overtake them," and yet "it is in my desire that I should chastise them; the people shall be gathered against them." Nemesis dogs the transgressor. Her approach may be gradual, but her coming is sure. Let Ephraim beware lest, like "a heifer that loveth to tread out the corn," he shirk a yoke



that is easy and a burden that is light, only to succumb to a yoke that is hard, and to bear a burden that is heavy.

“Though the mills of God grind slowly, yet they grind exceeding small ;

Though with patience he stands waiting, with exactness grinds he all.”

The prophet has disclosed the disastrous consequences of sin, but his purpose is to establish righteousness. God's aim is not to curse, but to bless. This universe in which the seeds of sin spring up into a harvest of disaster is so constituted that in it the seeds of righteousness spring up into a harvest of blessing. “Sow for righteousness,” and ye shall “reap in mercy.” Yes, even in the hearts of the men of Israel, if subjected to moral cultivation, these blessed fruits will grow. Let them “break up their fallow ground,” let them run the ploughshare of God's righteous law through their callous hearts, let them lay their inner souls open to the influences of heaven, and “the Lord will come and rain righteousness upon them.” If the transgression of God's laws causes iniquity to be visited on generations of those who hate God, the true scope and end of those laws is manifest as mercy is shown unto thousands of those who love him and keep his commandments.

But, alas! the prophet, like all spiritual teachers, speaks to heavy ears. The people have but little relish for righteousness. He makes one more appeal as he seeks to arouse their disgust with the wages of sin. “Ye have ploughed wickedness, ye have reaped iniquity: ye have eaten the fruit of lies.” Are ye satisfied? are ye blessed? are ye happy? One fruit of lies is seen in the carnage of Betharbel, where “the mother was dashed in pieces upon her children.” There is an illustration of the conqueror's triumph: will ye hasten the time of his triumph over yourselves? But the end is not yet. Your harvest is still to be

reaped. Surprise and disaster await you. The rays of the morning sun will awaken the inhabitants of the city to the fact that "the king of Israel is cut off." "The way of the transgressor is hard." Be wise, therefore, and turn into the ways of Wisdom; for "her ways are ways of pleasantness, and all her paths are peace."

So speaks the prophet Hosea to the doomed city of Samaria; but they would none of his counsel, they despised all his reproof. Shall we, men of America, be as slow to learn the lesson, true then, true now, true eternally, "Righteousness exalteth a nation, but sin is a reproach to any people"?

## Lesson VIII. May 24.

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### CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL.

*2 Kings xvii: 6-18.*

By PROFESSOR IRA M. PRICE, PH. D., MORGAN PARK, ILL.

THE seeds of Israel's captivity were sown by Solomon. The introduction of foreign wives into the royal family was the first step toward Israel's fall. Solomon was compelled to provide for all the outward forms of worship demanded by these foreigners at his court. The manifold idolatry of Israel's neighbors was thus planted on Israel's soil. Its influence was potent, its power widespread. Political oppression, religious depression, a cold intellectualism, a shrivelled spirituality, combined to hasten the rending asunder of the kingdom. Jeroboam the son of Nebat cuts the die that stamps the face of all the subsequent religious history of Israel. To satisfy idolatrous tendencies, he set up at the extremities of his land, Bethel and Dan, the two golden calves.

With the fourth dynasty, that of Omri, a new religious period begins. Omri's greatness and foreign popularity secured for his son Ahab alliance with the royal house of Zidon. With all the energy and fire of her strong character, Jezebel persecuted and destroyed the prophets of Jehovah, and transplanted into Israel the sensual worship of Baal and the Asherah. For a time it captivated and enslaved the whole people. But the rise of the dynasty of Jehu was the fall not only of Omri's house, but of Phœnician Baal-worship also. Once more men bowed before the calves

of Jeroboam I. Gradually, however, the two forms of idolatry began to assume the same level. Idolatry of all kinds was soon rampant. An earnest prophet, crying here or there, seemed powerless to help; the inevitable doom was almost in sight.

From a political point of view, Israel had seen some prosperous times. Omri had secured a large domain, and probably a rich revenue. Ahab was less fortunate in his political relations. An invasion of the great Assyrian army forced a coalition of all the petty western nations for self-defence. In an inscription of Shalmanezzer II. is an account of a battle between him and these peoples, which took place near the ancient city of Karkar. Among the enemies vanquished we find "twelve hundred chariots, twelve hundred horsemen, twenty thousand men of Hadadezer of Damascus; two thousand chariots, ten thousand men, of Ahab of Israel." In another inscription of the same monarch there is mention of "Jehu the son of Omri" as one of his tributaries. Here Omri appears as the ancestor of Jehu. From this and subsequent references to the "land of Omri" it appears that the Ninevites regarded Palestine as the land of the once great Omri, and the then incumbent of the throne as his descendant. The territory of Israel is mentioned as within the boundaries of Rimmon-nirari, a later king of Assyria. Israel attained its greatest prosperity near the close of the dynasty of Jehu, under Jeroboam II. It was brief. Pul, or Tiglath-pileser, captures the north, east, and middle of Palestine, putting it all under tribute to Nineveh. In his records we find the names of Azariah (Uzziah) of Judah, Menahem of Samaria, Ahaz of Judah, Pekah and Hoshea of Israel.

The anarchy that cursed Israel during its later history seems to have been instigated largely by the monarchs of the East. In one of Tiglath-pileser's inscriptions, where he gives

an account of his subjection of the land of Omri, he says: "Pekah their king I put to death, and I appointed Hoshea to the sovereignty over them." The Bible record, 2 Kings xv. 30, simply mentions the conspirator, murderer, and successor. The inscriptions tell us who stood behind, shifted the scenes, and directed the actors. Tiglath-pileser was absolute ruler of Palestine. Israel's power was broken, its army reduced, its land partially depopulated. Both politically and religiously, the fortunes of Israel were at a low ebb. Without national ambition, without religious hope, the nation was in the hands of a powerful enemy. Corruption, bribes, deceit, filled all homes, courts, and centres of trade. Political depression, foreign exaction, and private greed paralyzed all honest effort.

#### I. THE CAPTURE OF SAMARIA.

Hoshea seems to have been faithful to his Assyrian lord as long as the latter lived. But at the death of Tiglath-pileser and the accession of his successor, Shalmanezar IV., there was probably, as whenever rulers changed at Nineveh, a widespread revolt among their tributaries in the distant provinces. Hoshea, though religiously superior to his predecessors, despairs of the situation under the tyrants of the East, and appeals to So (Sabako), of Egypt, for relief. He withholds his accustomed tribute, thus openly defying the armies of the great king. His appeal to Egypt seems to have won for him only the enmity of the new king of Assyria. Although he is submissive at the first approach of the army, the Assyrian has only to learn the facts, when Hoshea is thrown into prison. Shalmanezar then "came up throughout all the land, and went up to Samaria and besieged it three years." He threshed the land right and left, taking captive and devastating, until he had driven the unsubmissive within the walls of Samaria.

Built, through the sagacity of Omri, on a projecting point of the mountains in the middle of the land, with natural protection on three sides, Samaria was the strongest fortress in the boundaries of the ten tribes. This point was the object of Shalmanezar's attack. With all the energy and skill at the command of the best army in the world, the siege began. The sacred historian, as if in impatient silence, passes over the events of the awful three years of siege. Only by comparison with other and similar distresses can we gain any conception of the terrible extremities to which the Samaritans must have been reduced. The biblical account would lead us to infer that the first besieger was the actual captor of the city. But a voice from the ruins of the palace at Khorsabad dispels that illusion. Out of that magnificent pile of buildings come forth words of certain meaning to solve the difficulty. Shalmanezar laid siege to Samaria, and spent two years in the attempt to capture it. At this juncture a new king, Sargon, accedes to the throne and finishes his predecessor's work. Sargon, mentioned but once in the Old Testament, was one of the mightiest kings that ever swayed the sceptre. His inscriptions are filled with his victories. One, of chief interest to us, reads: "The city of Samaria I besieged, I captured; 27,280 of its inhabitants I carried away; fifty chariots of them I took for my own use, the remaining things I allowed my under officers to take, my viceroy I appointed over them, the tribute of the former king I imposed on them." From a parallel inscription we learn that this event took place in the first year of his reign, 722 B. C. It was Sargon, then, who took Samaria, and transported its inhabitants to the cities of the East, "and placed them in Halah and on the Habor, the river of Gozan, and in the cities of the Medes." Although these places are not mentioned by Sargon in his own records, they are names familiar to cuneiform literature, and designate localities in

and near the Mesopotamian valley. Sargon distributed the Israelites in widely separate localities, both to punish them for their rebellion and to preclude any possibility of another uprising. They were forced to mingle with the foreign peoples whose idolatry and political oppression had been the means of their downfall. Samaria was fallen, depopulated, her glory reduced to dust; the Assyrian was her lord. Her territory was henceforth to be the home of a mongrel people.

## II. CAUSES OF THE CAPTIVITY OF ISRAEL.

After narrating the catastrophe of Samaria and the disposition of its population, the writer enumerates the causes of the same. "And it was so, because the children of Israel had sinned against Jehovah their God, who brought them up out of the land of Egypt, from under the hand of Pharaoh, king of Egypt, and had feared other gods, and walked in the statutes of the nations whom Jehovah cast out from before the children of Israel, and of the kings of Israel, which they practised."

The Israelites practised secretly the idolatry of their neighbors, building high places throughout the land, upon which they burnt incense to Canaanitish deities. Obelisks of Baal and the Asherim were set on every high hill and under every green tree. These Phœnician deities were symbols of the generative powers of Nature. They were the objects of the most degrading and licentious forms of worship. They appealed directly to the sensual impulses, and thus easily corrupted and led astray Israel. Israel did as "the nations whom Jehovah carried away before them; and wrought wicked things to provoke Jehovah to anger: and they served idols, whereof Jehovah had said unto them, Ye shall not do this thing."

During this period of history "Jehovah testified unto Israel, . . . by the hand of every prophet, and of every



seer, saying, Turn ye from your evil ways, and keep my commandments and my statutes, according to all the law which I commanded your fathers, and which I sent to you by the hand of my servants the prophets." Jehovah had raised up prophets to instruct, warn, and threaten almost every king of Israel. Jeroboam's chief prophet was Ahijah. Baasha, the reckless successor to Jeroboam's dynasty, was threatened by Jehu son of Hanani. Ahab's "enemy" and "troubler of Israel" was the rugged Elijah. The more refined and politic Elisha was helm to the ship of state for nearly half a century. Under his guidance the schools of the sons of the prophets flourished, and provided new men to uphold the religious life of Israel.

Soon as the oral prophets had passed away, the minor prophets began their career. Joel, with the scourge at hand, calls Israel to repentance, and foretells with frightful vividness the coming of the day of Jehovah. Jonah pictures Jehovah's readiness to forgive even the heathen when they repent. He cannot and will not do less for Israel if they turn from their sins. Amos, the shepherd-prophet, brings charges against seven neighbors of Israel. Their offences were small, but their penalty was great. Israel's offence was great, and neither famine, drought, blight, locust, pestilence, nor defeat had been effectual in bringing her to her senses. Her penalty would be destruction and captivity. Hosea, the weeping prophet, charges Israel with the sacrilegious desecration of sacred places.

Thus with superhuman earnestness, undaunted courage, and spiritual fire, these heroes of right and of Jehovah instructed, threatened, and condemned that careless, reckless, idolatrous, and godless people. "Notwithstanding they would not hear, but hardened their neck, like to the neck of their fathers, who believed not in Jehovah their God. And they rejected his statutes, and his covenant that he



made with their fathers, and his testimonies which he testified unto them; and they followed vanity, and became vain, and went after the nations that were round about them, concerning whom Jehovah had charged them that they should not do like them." In vain; Israel forsook all the commandments of Jehovah, and worshipped the host of heaven. This last had been particularly prohibited in the laws of Moses. Its prevalence in the later years of Israel's history became alarming. Baal-worship also existed in all parts of the land.

Even to the most repellent species of idolatry practised within the bounds of Palestine, that of Moloch, the god of the Ammonites, the deity whose wrath was appeased by human blood, Israel and Judah had given a conspicuous place. Israelites burned their children in fire to this bloodthirsty image. Divination and enchantment took the place of prophecy. The people seemed to have sold themselves to do all kinds of sin, as if they desired to displease God. Such were the primary causes of Israel's captivity and fall. "Therefore Jehovah was very angry with Israel, and removed them out of his sight."

### III. SIGNIFICANCE OF THE CAPTIVITY.

The ten tribes revolted against Solomon's successor in order to avoid political oppression. But their anarchistic method of choosing rulers made them for a hundred and fifty years the victims of the most arbitrary kings. By their disregard of political obligations and treachery toward their conquerors, these self-willed monarchs ultimately brought upon their people the just rewards of national rebellion,—captivity and servitude. Jehovah had permitted them to exist as a part of his chosen people, but they were under the same conditions as Judah; their continuance depended on their faithfulness to his commands.

When all law and testimony were ignored, and Jehovah was insulted and defied, then mercy gave place to justice, prosperity to disaster, blessings to cursings, and peace to captivity.

Since the reign of the powerful Omri, Samaria had been the capital and stronghold of Israel. It was the object of attack of every opposing force. It was the centre of trade, of worship, and of power. Samaria was the Jerusalem of the ten tribes, the Nineveh of Israel. It was the heart of the body of Israel. Its destruction was the death of every member of the body. The captivity of Samaria was the captivity of Israel. The whole form sank lifeless at the feet of the destroyer. The fall of the ten tribes was the end of the northern kingdom, the seceding element at the close of Solomon's reign. Two hundred and fifty years of idolatry, rebellion, and anarchy sealed their fate as a nation,—wiped them from the face of the earth as a blot and a disgrace in the sight of a holy and just God.

This catastrophe is the strongest kind of corroboration to the truth of the warnings of the prophets. They besought and entreated Israel to turn from all evil ways. They warned and threatened, they accused and condemned them by the word of Jehovah. The threatened fate at length came to pass. With steadfast purpose, Jehovah brought upon his enemies the just fruits of their evil deeds.

God is the same yesterday, to-day, and forever. Disregard of his words, commands, warnings, and threats is just as blameworthy in his sight to-day as two thousand five hundred years ago. Godless living is still the bane of national life. Let each one of us, by the grace of God, so live that the golden text of the lesson may never be true of us,—“Because you have forsaken Jehovah, he hath also forsaken you.”

## Lesson IX. May 31.

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### THE TEMPLE REPAIRED.

*2 Chronicles xxiv: 4-14.*

BY REV. WILLIAM W. LANDRUM, D. D., RICHMOND, VA.

THAT part of the reign of Joash embraced in the lesson of to-day is an oasis in the blasted desert extending through the reigns of his father and his son, which preceded and followed. The era is a gleam of sunlight bursting through gloomy clouds long overshadowing, and destined eventually to deluge the land in utter destruction.

A little child is on the throne. Heavenly innocence lights up his features, and a holy purpose warms his heart and nerves his hand. The dream of the boy king's life — inspired, doubtless, by Jehoiada, his kinsman and prime minister — is the recovery of his people to the worship of the true God, and through religious revival as a lever, the restoration of the government to its lost position, power, and prosperity. After the removal of obstacles and the annoyance of delay, we behold the temporary triumph of Joash's pious and patriotic design. For a season the nation is awakened from the sleep and death of anarchy and atheism. Overarching the land like the bow of God, bright on the bosom of the storm, is a theocratic unity among all the people in devotion and duty.

The work of Joash was to repair the temple of Jehovah and restore the sacrificial worship. No sooner was Joash on the throne than "Jehoiada made a covenant between the

Lord and the king and the people, that they should be the Lord's people."

The bright side of Joash's rule, which we study, naturally divides itself into the man and his mission, — his motive and his method.

I. The young monarch had to conquer, spiritually, his own heart as well as the heart of the people.

To know Joash you must understand his lineage and environment. These explain human character, and character manifests itself in conduct. Given one's ancestors and associations, and it is not a difficult matter to forecast the tendency of life. Emerson is credited with the saying that the first thing which a man should do who wishes to become good or great is to select his own grandparents, and next the place of his birth. Blood and the bolstering of natural surroundings will tell. The only power to overcome, modify, or restrain them is from God, — either directly through his Holy Spirit, or indirectly through his Word and its expounders and exemplars.

Heredity did little for, but much against, the formation of a pure character in the youthful sovereign. Only by recoil from the bent of transmitted tendencies could Joash ever hope to be a whit better than the corrupt and cruel kings from whose loins he sprang. Athaliah and Jezebel, incomparably the wickedest queens who ever degraded a throne, were his grandmother and great-grandmother.

The environment of Joash was Jehoiada. This great man was to his nephew like the Miriam who rescued and the mother who nursed the infant Moses. Jehoiada was the king-maker, the king-trainer. He was "the power behind the throne," its defence and palladium. The spirit of the age was incarnate in Jehoiada, because his bosom was its birthplace. Underneath the guise of royal rule in camp and capital and the courts of the Lord's house, Jehoiada was

the soul of the whole national policy. The prince was a puppet, while Jehoiada was the real potentate and the tribune of the people.

1. Though no natural tie bound Jehoiada to Joash, the great captain was, by marriage, the uncle of the helpless king. Jehoiada's affection secreted and his beneficent shrewdness saved the orphan when murder had marked him for its own. He was a father to Joash, discharging in high life and for a nation's weal a duty open to so many Christians in less conspicuous spheres in our own times. Blessed are they who learn how to multiply their lives and reduplicate their influence for God and the right, in the care, culture, and Christianizing of those fatherless and motherless ones whom a hard necessity brings begging to their doors.

2. Jehoiada was the impersonation of piety. With him the Creator came before the king. The throne, in his eyes, was for Jehovah's vicegerent, and the realm a theatre for the exercise of truth, justice, and holiness by the "Lord's anointed." Above the temple and the palace, which were but signs and symbols, beyond priests and potentates, Jehoiada's eyes peered through the clouds to the seat of the Almighty. Treason to the throne he regarded as apostasy from Jehovah.

3. Jehoiada's patriotism so blended with his piety that, though separable in thought, they were scarcely distinguishable in action. God and native land were his watchwords in war, his pæan in victory, his solace in peace. God and country united, all blessings, he believed, would abound; divorced, decay and death to the kingdom would draw on with swiftness and fatal certainty.

4. Jehoiada's philanthropy is seen in his self-restraint in the hour of triumph, when vengeance would have thrown a less pacific nature into a sea of slaughter. The revolution which resulted in the enthronement of Joash, was so dis-

creetly planned and executed by Jehoiada that but two persons perished,— the usurper, Athaliah, and the idolatrous priest. The government was well administered by Jehoiada during the minority of Joash.

II. The mission of Joash was to effect among his people a genuine reformation. He “was minded to repair the house of the Lord.” Its reconstruction he viewed as the road to religious revival and reformation.

Destruction and reconstruction are alternating or synchronous processes ever manifesting themselves in the efforts of God's people. Joash is the resultant and embodiment of both these forces.

Destruction is easy, and to wicked men only too natural. “The sons of Athaliah, that wicked woman, had broken up the house of God; and also all the dedicated things of the house of the Lord did they bestow upon Baalim.”

A child may shatter a statue which only the genius of a Pheidias or an Angelo could evoke from the rough product of the quarry. An idiot may fire a city whose wealth and beauty no wisdom can restore. A breath of slander may blast a reputation which a score of years built up by painful degrees. Health may be destroyed in one night's debauch or exposure which no subsequent years of temperance and no practitioner's skill can give back. Nations, too, may consume themselves with sensuality and extravagance beyond all power of self-recovery. Destructiveness is the momentum of unrenewed human nature.

Construction, on the other hand, and still more reconstruction, is as difficult as destruction is easy. To speed a bullet through the brain is the deed of a moment; to revive the dead body, impossible. To destroy the soul is so simple a thing that to do nothing, when the grace of Christ is offered you, is to die eternally. To save that dead soul, always beyond human power, requires divine omnipotence.

Even God recreates with infinite labor. The Almighty made man out of dust with a word ; the Almighty redeems man at the unspeakable cost of Gethsemane and the cross.

Ruin total and desperate, utter and well-nigh universal wreck, was the wretched scene on which the boy-king Joash first opened his eyes. Apostasy and anarchy, always twin-sisters in guilt and blood, had done their work under the queen-mother of Joash's father. Beholding the desolations of Israel under the just retribution of an iniquity-hating God, we are somewhat prepared to understand and value the stupendous work of Joash's reign.

III. Joash was unselfish in his motive. Reconstruction was aimed at by him from the lofty considerations of godliness and patriotism.

The times called loudly for reform. The priests were apathetic, the Levites lethargic, the people spiritually lifeless. Jehoiada's stroke of policy was for the time successful, binding all elements of society into one, just as its failure would have broken him into atoms. But the shouts of the populace on the coronation-day of Joash were not so much hosannas to God on the re-instalment of his rightful representative as the obsequious plaudits of underlings sounded in the ears of position and power. The popular heart was still truant from Jehovah. The covenant made by Jehoiada between God and the people with all the impressiveness of solemn pomp was, on the people's part, the caprice of a merry hour. Not so with the leader. While the people were shallow and sensational, deep down in Jehoiada's heart was an irrepressible longing for the divine favor. This would come, he knew, only through national repentance and reformation. So Jehoiada put his burden on the boy-king's heart, as Nehemiah, at a later epoch, laid his on the breast of his alien sovereign in the exile.



Joash aimed at a revival of religion. Revivals take their rise in the individual heart. The kingdom of heaven, just at hand to millions in Palestine under the reign of Herod, was first descried and heralded by the solitary John of the wilderness. A student's heart, aflame with fresh zeal at Oxford, kindled the dawn of the Wesleyan revival within the slumbering ranks of the English Establishment.

Revivals of religion, if genuine, are contagious. One aroused soul, like a spark, fires another and another, till crowds become animated by the same holy purpose. Cities, communities, countries, are swept by a conflagration of holy ardor.

Revivals naturally induce co-operation. The "Lord's hidden ones," seven thousand strong, were ready to pledge heart and hand with the king and his minister. To a chosen few among God's people loyalty and love are constant quantities. Change with them means not relapse but reinvigoration. The "one hundred and twenty" of "the upper chamber," though the five thousand of Galilee were lost to sight, stood ready for Pentecost, and when the Spirit endued them with power, advanced to battle for the Lord as solid as a Greek phalanx and as alert and tireless as the Jesuits. So it came to pass that there was a waiting and expectant people in the reign of Joash. All had a mind to work as God inspired and impelled them.

IV. The method of Joash for increasing men's interest in religion was the restoration of the Lord's house. Revival in divine life was both the cause and the consequence of its reconstruction.

A dilapidated temple of God is painfully significant; it speaks volumes. The spectacle caused Joash to bid priests bring the money and the dedicated things into the house of the Lord, and with the proceeds of these he repaired the breaches. The priests, however, were not so earnest as the



king. So late as the twenty-third year of his reign nothing had been done. The priests were now called to account, and another expedient was adopted to secure the great end. A proclamation was made throughout Judah to bring to "the Lord the collection that Moses laid upon Israel in the wilderness." Jehoiada took a chest and made a hole in the lid of it, and in this all the money gifts for the temple were deposited. The people offered willingly. After a time the high priest and the king's scribe took the money and counted it, and gave it to those that did the work and that had the oversight of the temple. "So the workmen wrought, and the work was perfected by them, and they set the house of God in his state, and strengthened it." They made no vessels of silver and gold till the temple was repaired, and then from the money left, these vessels were made. In this work the officers "dealt faithfully," though held to no strict account for the money they received.

Reconstruction, as has been said, is an arduous undertaking. The temple which David planned and Solomon executed, in an age of unexampled splendor, rose in a general holiday on the stalwart shoulders of a young, ambitious, and growing people. The task was a light thing for the exuberance of national enthusiasm. But the temple that Jehoiada and Joash repaired, crept slowly up, little by little, as the insects in the Pacific build the coral islands. As the work went on, the people were depressed by the recollection of the sins which had wantonly wrought the awful wreck and ruin. But the work was all the braver and better because of the depression and difficulties which beset it.

The great collection under Joash for the temple is a model for Christian beneficence. The nineteenth century must be the most generous of the ages, or it will prove recreant to its high duty as the great missionary century. Yet our churches are still ignorant of the biblical rules of giving,

or, where acquainted with them, are shamefully neglectful of their observance.

Legacies are not the highest order of Christian giving. Shaftesbury speaks with contempt of "magnificent bequests," as though there were any real liberality in giving away what one can no longer keep or use for himself. "Munificent donations," but not "munificent bequests." It is estimated that eight billion dollars are treasured up in the hands of Protestant Christians to-day in the United States, — a sum so great that it staggers our mental power to conceive it. And the majority of those who own the mammoth fortunes, if they ever mean to give, as duty demands, are willing to postpone the discharge of that duty till they are dead.

Dinly shadowed in the people's offering under Joash, but distinctly taught in the letters of Paul, are eight rules of Christian giving, which we do well to fix permanently in mind. They are these: We should give by principle and habit, — principle as opposed to policy, and habit as opposed to an occasional spasm of generosity; in the spirit of stewardship, remembering that all we have we hold in trust for the Lord; according to ability, for, as John Foster says, "Power to its last particle is duty;" willingly and cheerfully, for "the Lord loveth a cheerful giver;" secretly as a general thing, as unto the Lord, and not unto men; as an act of worship, kindred to prayer and praise: pastors may well say, at the time of the offertory, "Let us now worship God with our usual morning offering;" in faith, venturing on God, as did the widow with her two mites; and intelligently, as to the object, — not only that every object may be aided that is worthy of our pecuniary help, but each in proportion to its need.

Apply the lesson to our own times. Mankind is "the house of the Lord" in ruins. We are under solemn obligations to reconstruct this broken and shattered temple. The

race is conscious of its deplorable condition. More, it knows full well where the blame belongs. The pagan world is not so much an object of misfortune to excite Christian pity, as a wilful sinner, weak and wayward, as the natural result of its own misdeeds.

In the first chapter of his letter to the Romans Paul argues the ill desert of every human creature, without exception. In order to do this, he shows that no excuse for the heathen's sin can be urged upon the ground of moral ignorance. He explicitly teaches that the pagan knows there is one supreme God; that he is a Spirit; that he is holy and sin-hating; that he is worthy to be worshipped; and that men ought to be thankful for his benefits. He affirms that the heathen know that an idol is a lie; that licentiousness is sin; that envy, malice, and deceit are wicked; and that they who practise such sins are worthy of eternal punishment.

America is a temple of the Lord in need of repair. Once our country was evangelical, Sabbath-keeping, Bible-loving, church-going, Christ-honoring. Of late years many influences have conspired to change our national character and customs. Emigration, civil strife, illiteracy, political corruption, the congestion of population in great cities, have each been a baneful factor in the unhappy result; while to these must be added a foreign and false Christianity, with a Pope who despises the President, and a church which would enslave the state. Agnosticism, communism, and, most disastrous and alarming of all, materialism and mammon-worship, throw their portentous shadow over the hearts and homes of professed disciples of Christ, and lay on faith and duty their paralyzing hand.

When viewed in connection with the vast wealth in the hands of its members, and the power for good which is committed to its trust, the responsibility of the Christian Church is appalling.

Some may recall a striking incident committed to the New York press, a few years ago, by a deeply humbled minister. One of the leading members of his church was greatly distressed in his last sickness on reviewing his mode of life, reflecting upon the large amount he had spent upon his family, and the small sum he had given the Lord. The pastor endeavored to comfort him in every way. He spoke of his having given cheerfully and as much as others. He reminded him that the best of us are unprofitable servants, and must look to the mercy of God in Christ as our only hope. The troubled man found no peace or comfort, but grew more and more uneasy and distressed as his end drew near. At last, taking the hand of his pastor, he said, "Brother, I am going to the Judge, unprepared to meet him, because you have been unfaithful to me. For years I have lived and taught my family to live largely for this world. We have denied ourselves nothing, but spent thousands on personal comforts and luxuries. When I gave hundreds to Christ and his church, it should have been thousands. My business energy, time, and money have been mostly devoted to self-pleasing and gratification; and how can I meet my Judge and give an account of my stewardship? I am beyond recovery. Do what you can to save other professors who are in the same current of self-indulgence and extravagance, which is sweeping them to destruction."

## Lesson X. June 7.

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### HEZEKIAH, THE GOOD KING.

*2 Chronicles xxix: 1-11.*

By REV. THOMAS S. BARBOUR, FALL RIVER, MASS.

THE scripture which we are to study deals with the reformatory work of King Hezekiah. In considering this let us note, first, the influences to which the king's action probably ought to be ascribed.

The surroundings of Hezekiah in his youth seem, at first view, to have been unfavorable in the extreme. He was the son of a depraved father. He grew up at a corrupt court. The chronicles of the kings of Judah furnish but slight encouragement to those disposed to regard mankind as in helpless bondage to circumstances. Good kings and bad follow one another in very illogical succession. It must be that there is a self-acting power at the centre of every personal life. Let us cling to the belief, too, that, however vast the moral inequalities of human lives may be, no life is allowed by the Creator to be altogether destitute of gracious influences. In Hezekiah's case, at least, we can have no doubt that such influences were present.

It is not unnatural to believe that his mother, presumably the daughter of Zechariah, the faithful prophet of King Uzziah's day, was a woman of devout character. If so, what could she do in her grief at the conduct of her husband but that which so many a broken-hearted wife has done, — seek solace in the training of her child ?

To the loving nurture of a mother was added the faithful counsel of godly men. Moral giants lived in those days. Micah was prophesying, Nahum was about to begin his work. Still another, a sublimer figure, is revealed by the side of the heir of the throne of Judah. Seven years before the birth of Hezekiah, a young man, gazing into the Holy Place of the temple, had caught a vision of the divine glory and had listened to the anthem which caused the very pillars of the temple-gate to tremble. During the entire lifetime of Hezekiah, Isaiah was fulfilling his office in Jerusalem. Tradition says that he was Hezekiah's tutor; there can be no doubt that he was his faithful counsellor. Repulsed by the father, he would naturally turn with the greater earnestness to the son. Who shall estimate the influence for good which this greatest of the prophets — so devoted in his love for the nation, so fearless in his loyalty to truth, so immovable in his faith in God — would bring to bear upon the impressible mind of the royal youth!

But all this touches only the outer circle of the gracious influences by which Hezekiah was encompassed. It has been said, and there is a world of truth in the saying, that more than half of the environment of any man is — God. The God who is not far from every one of us was near to the young prince in the corrupt capital of Judah.

We have good reason for believing that Hezekiah had not been unresponsive to his heavenly promptings. A work begun so quickly after his accession to the throne must have been premeditated. We must suppose that Hezekiah had lived a thoughtful life. Possessing in some degree the power, enjoyed so fully in this age of books, of determining his surroundings for himself, he had perhaps lived in closer intimacy with "David his father" than with his father Ahaz. He had seriously considered the responsibilities awaiting him. He had pondered the lesson taught by the varying fortunes of

Judah, taught yet more powerfully by the unhappier history of the sister-kingdom whose knell of doom was already sounding. He saw with clear discernment that it was because God's people had "turned their backs upon him" that they had been delivered "to trouble, to astonishment, and to hissing." Before the hour had come that summoned him to the throne his mind was dominated by a fixed resolution to work for righteousness. Wise and fortunate are those who on reaching the threshold of manhood's responsibilities find themselves fore-armed with a purpose so thoughtful and sublime.

The character of the work to which the king addressed himself is deserving of attention. It was a radical work. Great as was the peril to which the kingdom was exposed from external attack, great as was its moral unsoundness, Hezekiah saw that all its trouble was rooted in ungodliness. The king's initial act in "opening the doors of the house of the Lord" was, it is likely, more philosophical than he himself realized. Reverence for God lies at the basis of all that is trustworthy in private character and of all that is enduring in public order. The first phrase of the prayer taught his disciples by Him who loved righteousness and men as no other ever loved them, is a petition for the hallowing of God's name.

Hezekiah's reform was also positive in nature. It addressed itself not chiefly to the extermination of idolatry, but to the development of a genuine faith. When this positive work was accomplished, the necessary negative accompaniment was sure to follow. Of their own accord the people went out to "break in pieces" the emblems of idolatry. The agency of Hezekiah was in this respect like that exercised by the Spirit of God in the sinful heart. When God wishes to regenerate the soul he does not at the outset uproot sinful affections, he implants love for himself.



Hezekiah's was a thorough-going work. The taunting charge of illiberality could not extort from him the smallest concession to the false religions of other lands. Not only image and "grove" — the sacred pillar or tree of Astarte — were to be hewn down, but the worship of the "high places" was to be destroyed. This was not in all cases idolatrous. Because of their fancied nearness to the heavens, lofty elevations were by many ancient peoples used as sanctuaries. The Israelites, who, in view of the inconvenience of frequent visits to the temple, clung tenaciously to their local worship, had readily adopted this custom. Such worship was attended with grave peril. Many sanctuaries suggested many gods. Yet so popular was the custom of worship in the high places that even well-meaning kings hesitated to antagonize it. The record often runs, "Yet the high places were not taken away. The people still sacrificed and burnt incense in the high places." Of Asa and Jehoshaphat we are told both that they did and that they did not interfere with this form of worship. They probably destroyed such sanctuaries as had become openly idolatrous, and allowed the others to remain. But Hezekiah adopted extreme measures. The brazen serpent fashioned by Moses in the wilderness, and still preserved, the people regarded with superstitious veneration. Hezekiah declared that the image was like any other "piece of brass," and broke it in pieces. In this the reformer was bold almost to rashness. The taunt of Senacherib, "Hath not Hezekiah taken away the high places and altars of Jehovah," suggests very strongly that some, at least, of the people were perplexed by the king's course as apparently impious. Hezekiah would not consent that even the germs of idolatry should remain in the land.

How difficult was the mission to which Hezekiah thus committed himself! Idolatry being so thoroughly established in the kingdom, so firmly rooted in the hearts of the



people, what out a faith rivalling that of David in his conflict with Goliath would have induced the king to set for himself so gigantic a task!

In the mode of procedure adopted by Hezekiah in carrying through his reformation are certain things worthy of notice. It is peculiarly gratifying to observe that he acted promptly. The die was cast. In the first month of his reign, Hezekiah, like Abraham, who, when bidden to offer Isaac, "rose up early in the morning, . . . and went to the place of which God had told him," was wise in allowing himself no time for hesitation. Delay never softens the hard aspects of duty or lessens its difficulties. Particularly when called into new surroundings may one wisely remember Hezekiah's example. For committing one's self to the service of Christ, no other time is so favorable as the first year, the first month, the first day, of one's entrance upon a new sort or period of life.

It is instructive to notice that Hezekiah engaged personally in the work of reform. He did not commit it all to subalterns. To him no duties of royalty seemed more honorable or important than those connected with the maintenance of Jehovah's cause. It is a lesson to men in these modern times. Depend upon it, the secular employments of the busiest life cannot safely be allowed to separate any man from personal, active participation in work for the advancement of the kingdom of Christ.

Deserving of special mention is the fact that in the prosecution of his policy Hezekiah relied chiefly upon moral influences. He might have compelled, but he chose rather to persuade. In this he showed the utmost wisdom. If the reform was to be real, the hearts of the people must be enlisted in it. In this, too, we read a lesson that is of value in our modern day. Civil law can at best do but little toward genuinely reforming men from evil ways. Helpful and needful it may indeed be for the protection of the weak; but let it

never be forgotten that there can be no genuine and permanent uplifting of society except as the moral forces embodied in Christianity are made to take hold of the consciences and wills of men.

We are, finally, prepared to inquire what results were effected by the king's determined effort.

The immediate outcome was most gratifying and most wonderful. The officers of religion responded, — the priests somewhat slowly, but the Levites with all their hearts. The people did the same. The nation felt to its utmost limits the electric thrill of a new life. The temple was re-opened, and a solemn service of humiliation and re-dedication to Jehovah was observed. Such a Passover festival was celebrated "as had not been known." The crusade against idolatry waxed strong throughout the kingdom, and "a burst of spring-time," as Dean Stanley beautifully calls it, succeeded.

"The thing was done suddenly," the record says. But is not the same true of well-nigh every successful reform? A single generation cut the Gordian knot of American slavery. Mr. Whittier advises all young men to ally themselves with some righteous but unpopular cause, assuring them that they may hope to see it triumphant, however dark the outlook at first seems. Whatever form of government men may establish, it is the few who rule. Public sentiment, strong as we often think it, is an exceedingly volatile thing. The crowd that to-day salutes the Son of Man with a hallelujah, may to-morrow, being brought under the influence of a few determined murderers, cry "Crucify him!" There is almost no limit to the power of a man if he have genuine conviction and energy of will.

Those advocating a righteous cause have at least two excellent reasons for viewing it with larger hope than external appearances warrant. Something in every moral being is in secret alliance with truth and justice. When a preacher of

righteousness lifts his voice in the wilderness of this world, all that is noblest in the human heart goes out to meet him. The second reason is stronger still; it is that by which the sacred historian explains the success of Hezekiah. "The Lord had prepared the people." We may reckon with confidence upon God's care over any work of his. Whenever he raises up a leader and commander for the people, he disposes a people to follow and obey.

To the reformatory work of King Hezekiah must be attributed a result still more imposing, though to be sure not more important. It delivered the southern kingdom from the fearful peril by which the northern kingdom had been overwhelmed.

To a strange device, truly, did Hezekiah resort in the hour of the kingdom's peril at the hands of a world-conquering power,—that of "opening the doors of the house of the Lord." But it proved effective. The cloud that had long overshadowed the land had now grown denser. Down through the defiles of Lebanon came the Assyrian host,— "the very cedars shrieking in terror." The Assyrian king seemed about to make a final disposition of Judah. What hope could the little kingdom cherish? Syria, Hamath, Arphad, the Phœnician city-sovereignities, Ammon, Moab, Edom, Israel, had fallen. To the north of Judah not one independent kingdom remained. There is the Assyrian army, encamped by the walls of Jerusalem. Hezekiah is "shut up like a bird in a cage." How reasonably might the Assyrian exult, "Who was there among all the gods of the nations that could deliver his people out of my hand?" But between the camp and the city an unseen Form was standing, a Hand mightier than armies was stretched out, and a single night sufficed for the work of deliverance. In the morning, when the people of Jerusalem arose, looked out, and hesitatingly ventured forth, behold, where the camp of the

enemy had been they found only "dead corpses"! What wonder that the historian should doubly emphasize the lifelessness of the once mighty foe!

Thus, even as the records of Assyria and Egypt bear witness, the Assyrian conqueror met with his first great disaster. The people of Judah, amazed and well-nigh wild with their wonder and joy, were led to sing their exultant song, "God is in the midst of her; she shall not be moved. God shall help her when the morning dawns." And thus it was demonstrated for all time that no external power, however strong, could prevail against a people loyal to Jehovah; that Israel had fallen, and Judah was at last to fall, not because their enemies had grown mighty, but because they themselves had become corrupt.

Is it not a painful thing to have to add that even so thorough a reform as this did not prove lasting? Some of the people doubtless remained steadfast, but the most fell away. A new generation arose. Kings came to the throne who were of the house of David and Hezekiah only in name. Again the tide of idolatry and moral corruption overflowed the land. "Our faith comes in moments; our vice is habitual," was true at least of the chosen people. What more forcible commentary upon the declaration of scripture that "the heart of the sons of men is fully set in them to do evil," can be imagined than is furnished by the history of the sister kingdoms! In Israel the development of ungodliness was almost without a break. In Judah the lesson is, if possible, even more impressive; for though again and again, in the reign of some devout monarch, barriers were interposed which for a time checked the flood of iniquity, the people quickly beat them down, and swept onward to their final fall.

Scarcely less painful is it to mark in the life of the reformer himself some things which compel us to abate a little the

admiration awakened in us by his conduct on the whole. More than once as he watched the approach of the Assyrian the king's faith faltered. In emergency he for a time resorted to expedients unworthy a servant of Jehovah. And "in the business of the ambassadors of the princes of Babylon" he displayed vanity which, despicable in itself, appears doubly shameful when we reflect that the visit of these men was subsequent to the overthrow of the Assyrian conqueror, and that their mission was to "inquire of the wonder that had been done in the land." Truly the best of men are but almoners upon divine grace.

Yet we should be doing injustice to one whom God has delighted to honor, were we to allow even these blemishes upon the life of Hezekiah to blind us to the genuine nobility of his character. His life reveals much that is worthy of all praise and emulation. In a degenerate age he made choice of righteousness and the service of God. He won from the incorruptible historian a commendation accorded to but one other of the kings of Judah. He wrought for his country a noble service. The unique incident by which the closing period of his personal history is distinguished, was typical; for even as little less than a third of the years of Hezekiah's life were a gift of God in answer to the king's prayer, so little less than a third of the years of the life of the kingdom was a gift of God in response to Hezekiah's reformatory work.

## Lesson XI. June 14.

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### THE BOOK OF THE LAW FOUND.

*2 Chronicles xxxiv: 14-33.*

BY REV. GEORGE E. HORR, JR., BOSTON, MASS.

UNDER the reign of Manasseh there was a strong reaction from the reforms instituted by Hezekiah. The worst excesses of idolatry and vice prevailed again throughout the nation. Manasseh was made a captive, and with great indignities carried to Babylon, where his name stands twice recorded upon the monuments. The reforms of his mature age, when his heart turned to God, did not strike deep root, nor was there much religious improvement throughout the nation until his successor, the young Josiah, came to the throne.

During the six years preceding the incidents of our narrative, Josiah had zealously set about uprooting idolatry. He had made little progress, when one of those apparently trivial incidents occurred, upon which the fate of great events often turns, and straightway Josiah's reform received a marked spiritual impulse. That incident was the discovery in the temple treasury of a copy of "the book of the law."

Whether this scroll was the entire Pentateuch, or that spiritual summary of its first four books which we call the book of Deuteronomy,—though a question of some importance in Biblical criticism,—has little direct bearing upon the religious lessons of the story. Either supposition would

meet the requirements of the record. The view, however, has gained large currency that the scroll discovered by the men of Josiah was none other than the temple copy of the entire Pentateuch, which, according to the rule laid down in Deuteronomy xxxi. 26, was to be put "in the side of the Ark of the Covenant."

We must bear in mind that books were then few, and that long before the days of Josiah the liturgies of worship, compiled from the Pentateuch, had largely taken the place of the inspired books themselves, just as now in the Roman Church the liturgies take the place of the Scriptures. The law itself was neglected until it was forgotten. That it came to light in the course of extensive repairs upon the temple, and that its value was recognized by the High Priest, is exactly what we should have expected. It was not an unknown book that was discovered, but a lost one. The king may not have been entirely ignorant of its contents, but when he saw and read the scroll itself it made a most profound impression upon his mind.

We to-day are in some danger of losing the Scriptures. The fact that millions of Bibles have been circulated, and that the book has been translated into nearly every language, of course precludes the possibility of our losing the Bible as a volume of literature. But it is possible for the Word of God to sink out of our consciousness, through our indifference to it, as it sank out of the consciousness of Israel. We may also make so much of prayer-books and creeds, of systems of doctrine and religious treatises, that the Scriptures themselves are seen only by a reflected light. Because we have been acquainted with the Scriptures from childhood, as we grow older we may fancy that we know what they contain, and leave them unstudied and unread. It is not unusual in public worship for the devotional services and the sermon to come between the soul and God's Word. They



supersede study of the Scriptures, so that should one really set about searching the Word of God for himself, it would become a new book for him, a fresh revelation from God. It is not unusual to find men so wedded to traditional interpretations, having origin in some theological theory, that when they read the Bible they are like one looking upon a landscape through colored spectacles. Really open-eyed, open-hearted study of the Scriptures is not very common. Yet nothing can take the place of such study. Even Huldah the prophetess did not supersede the book. With her divine gift of insight she discovered the application of the principles of "the book of the law" to the occasion, as perhaps Josiah could not have done. He could recognize truth which he could not have discovered. But until we have an infallible interpreter of the Scriptures, every interpretation must commend itself to the personal judgment of those to whom it comes. Protestants must pass upon their prophets. No theologian, critic, teacher, or minister can have such authority with us as to take away from the lowliest his right and duty of searching the Scriptures for himself, and of bringing all doctrines and opinions to the test of God's Word. All through the past there has been a constant tendency to make the interpretations and opinions of some men, who have happened to write books or creeds, binding upon the consciences of others. When this tendency rules, we are in danger of losing the Bible. It is our duty to assert our liberty in this matter, and to vindicate our liberty by conscientious, personal study of God's Word. Water that has been standing in a pitcher for a week we refuse to drink, unless we can get no other. At a fountain each wishes his own fresh draught. But in spiritual things we are wont to desert the fountain and to drink what others have drawn and bring to our doors in musty barrels. It is wonderful how, when one with a reverent, honest heart



goes to the Scriptures for himself, a light gleams from the pages. God speaks to the soul, and then, for the first time, the man finds the Book.

The fact cannot escape us, even in the most cursory study of this record, that the results of this discovery of "the book of the law" are parallel to the experiences of those in our own day who, in the deeper spiritual sense, find the Word of God.

It lies upon the face of the narrative that this discovery of "the book of the law" gave Josiah a new basis for faith. He had been prosecuting his reforms in a noble spirit. His reign up to this time had done not a little for the moral elevation of the people. In all this he had been prompted by his perceptions of what was right and wise. The discovery of this scroll, however, gave him a divine authority for much that he had been doing. The king must have felt when he read this book that he was supernaturally strengthened in his great task of reformation.

There are few of us who do not desire to have our various undertakings approved by those in whose sagacity and moral discernment we trust. If we cannot make the course of action that seems right and wise to us seem so to any of our fair-minded friends, our faith in our own perceptions is inevitably weakened. When one is prosecuting an unpopular reform, there come to him moments of supreme loneliness. "Is it possible that I am right about this thing, and every one else wrong?" he finds himself inadvertently asking. The strength of the great reformers has not been that their stubborn self-will was enough to carry them against the world; they have been men like Moses, who have "endured as seeing Him who is invisible;" they have been consciously doing the will of God. We see at a glance what an enormous power such a faith is. Ewald says that the discovery of this book gave a strong momentum to the

reforms of Josiah, which had begun to lag. It must have been so. Now this effort to destroy idolatry, for instance, did not rest upon the judgment or spiritual intuition of Josiah, but upon the Word of the Lord. Josiah undertook his work with a new heart; the Lord was with him.

We have incidentally suggested here the broad distinction between our certainty of what seems to be true and our certainty of what is vouched for as true by the Word of God. It is often said that truth is truth, and that Revelation cannot make truth more true. Socrates and Plato, for instance, give us many admirable statements of spiritual truth. Jesus was doubtless anticipated in some of his sayings by uninspired men. It is therefore hastily assumed that the names of Socrates and Plato, of Epictetus and Marcus Aurelius and the rest, may not be unworthy of mention, to say the least, in the same breath with the name of our Lord. Those who make such statements overlook, among other things, the fact that Revelation alone is the authoritative standard of spiritual truth. Spiritual intuitions and the religious consciousness are not final. The statement of Plato may be true, but our certainty that it is true rests upon a wholly different basis when the Scriptures declare the same truth. The difference between books of human authorship and the Word of God is that the former are "guesses at truth," the latter is a revelation of the truth. The former may be gold, but its fineness is uncertain; the latter is gold the fineness of which is certified to by the Government of the Universe.

We can hardly miss seeing, also, how this discovery of "the book of the law" enlarged Josiah's conception of duty. With the scroll before him, the true course of national reformation was plain. The entrance of the Word of the Lord gave him light. When we first read this narrative, it seems as if knowledge of the contents of the book simply

disclosed the extent of the nation's departure from God; but when we examine the passage again, we see that while the light that shone upon Josiah revealed the nation's sin, at the same time it illuminated the true path.

The Word of the Lord performs this double office for all to whom it comes. It reveals sin; it discloses the path to a better life. Men shun the light because it shows them to themselves; but when one is willing to know the worst about himself, he finds that the light he hated has brought him a vision of the ways of blessedness. Judah's true blessedness could not be found by neglect of the light. That made the national life progressively narrower, meaner, poorer. The knowledge that came through this book was to Josiah and to the nation what a flash of light is to a ship on a dangerous coast: the light reveals the rocks upon which she nearly struck; it also reveals the safe channel and the course to the harbor.

Personal experience testifies to this worth of the Scriptures. Few Christians cannot recall times when the truths of God's Word have come to them like a heavenly vision; things were seen from a different point of view; the great spiritual ends of life became clear; sonship to God became real; life itself received a divine uplift and impulse. We sometimes let ourselves speak of the commands and prohibitions of the Scriptures as restrictions upon the breadth and liberty of life. We think of a religious life as narrow, and of the life of the world as broad and free; but the exact contrary is the truth. God's prohibitions are not restrictions upon life, but protections to it. They mark the way to nobility and blessedness. Throughout the Scriptures God's calls to men are calls to blessedness. The revelations of the nature of sin and its penalties, the stern prohibitions and the almost heart-breaking warnings, are incidental to the great end of leading men to a noble, broad, and happy life.

It is the worldly life that becomes narrow, bigoted, sordid, self-limited, and slavish. It is the life to which God's Word calls us that becomes longer, fuller, finer, and that expands in the freedom of a sonship to which the whole wide universe is the Father's home. David saw this clearly when in that matchless poem of praise to the law of the Lord he said, "I have seen an end of all perfection, but thy commandment is exceeding broad." It is broad in itself, and it broadens the life of the man who obeys it. It has been finely said that Wickliffe's translation of the Scriptures "lifted the lowly English roof to take in heights beyond the stars." That is what this Word of God does for the man and the people who receive it. It lifts, expands, and ennobles life. It infuses into it the breadth and glory and power of God. A better gift than money, or ships, or armies, or famous victories, or commercial supremacy came to Josiah when in the scroll unrolled before him he learned the true path in which God called the nation to walk.

The narrative also discloses another result that came from the knowledge of the truth. It illustrates the way truth enters a human life and recreates it. There was a deep and subtile affinity between the soul of Josiah and the truth that came to him in the scroll. It entered his heart, and gave him a fresh, strong wish to bring his own desires and purposes and the national life into line with the requirements of God. The narrative is a lucid comment on the declaration of David, "The law of the Lord is perfect, converting the soul." Again and again our Lord compared revealed truth to a seed. It is not likely that we have yet grasped the full meaning of the comparison. The more science uncovers the secrets of the seed, the better we shall understand the import of these texts. But evidently the prominent teaching in this metaphor is that just as the seed contains in itself a power which assimilates the forces of

earth and air and water into its growth, so that by the hidden loom of life in it the structure of plant is woven, so the Word of God in a human heart assimilates the forces of affection and thought and will to itself, and by its mysterious life-power weaves a new character.

Christian experience almost universally confirms this. Once the Word of God was nothing to us ; but there came a time when the truth was spiritually found. It fell out that we freshly read the Bible, or that some truth from it reached us in a sermon, or a hymn, or a conversation, or started up in memory. Like Josiah, we knew that it was a message from God to the conscience. It stirred us to the depths. It did not seem so much as if we had found the truth, it seemed as if the truth had found us, and held us in its grasp. It awoke grief and shame ; but it also gave the vision of a true life, which we had never seen before. We were prompted to do strange things. We confessed the wrong we had done, we made restitution, we turned from sin and hated it, we prayed to God for help. New truths kept opening upon the mind, as the parting of clouds reveals stars unseen before ; and the heart at last came to rest in some disclosure and conviction of God's infinite tenderness and love for us. The experience of Josiah, to be sure, is not strictly parallel to the conversion of one who has gone on carelessly or defiantly in sinful ways, it rather resembles the spiritual illumination of one who, before he has seen the light, has been seeking it. But all spiritual experiences are traversed by a deep inner line ; we recognize their identity. The new desire that sprang up in King Josiah's heart after he had read "the book of the law," illustrates and interprets to us across the centuries the recreating, transforming power of the Word of the Lord.

We cannot study this narrative with appreciation without at least two reflections. It shows the large importance

to each one of us of our finding the truth of God. As the sunbeam falling across the floor comes from the sun, and in its path it is a straight line to the sun, so the truth from God's Word that falls across our souls comes from God, and in its path it is a straight line to God. Across spaces that seem to us immeasurable, from the unseen to the seen, this ray of light comes. It is the bond that binds this visible world to the city of the vision. That light shines into our hearts, and forms a tie between our souls and the final blessedness of the redeemed when we personally submit ourselves to obey the truth revealed to us. It is not enough to have the truth in our Bibles, in our sermons, in our Sunday-school instructions, or in religious books. We only find the truth when we obey the truth that comes to us outwardly in these ways. Then something in us that is deeper than the mind finds it; it enters the soul, and becomes the pledge and the power of Eternal Life.

And then, too, we see that the chief blessing we can confer on others is to give them the truth God has given us. Under the rule of the "practical" man our benevolence has been largely materialized. We have come to think that what men most need is choicer food and finer clothes, more spacious housing and ampler leisure. The man who protests that ends of life are spiritual, that man cannot live by bread alone, that the gift of a Bible may be an infinitely better gift than one of a loaf of bread, that communities need churches far more than they need soup-houses, is in some danger of being crowded to the wall. The record we have studied lifts up a voice we can hear. The experience of Josiah instructs us. The men who went to the temple treasury came back with more than money. That ancient scroll contained the Word of God. Those words upon the parchment that could be traced with a pen or uttered with the breath were the divinest things in Judah, and they were

the most precious gift that could have come to Josiah or to Jerusalem. The best gift we can bestow upon another is not the gift of any material thing whatever. The best gift is a word, some words of God, some fragment of his message to our world, of his infinite love and his gracious call to blessedness, — words that find some of their interpretation in our own hope and faith and love. We cannot give any one a choicer gift than this.



## Lesson XII. June 21.

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### CAPTIVITY OF JUDAH.

*2 Kings xxv: 1-12.*

BY PROFESSOR SHAILER MATHEWS, WATERTVILLE, ME.

IN the days of Zedekiah Jerusalem was no stranger to sieges. During the brief reign of Zedekiah's immediate predecessor, Jehoiachin, Nebuchadnezzar had invested the Holy City, and departed only after the king had surrendered himself, his harem, and many nobles. At his departure the conqueror had appointed as king Mattaniah, the third or fourth son of Josiah, after changing his name to Zedekiah and binding him to loyalty by the most sacred oaths. The new king was a young man of twenty-one, in no way strong enough to rule a decimated people and an impoverished city. Yet the affairs of the little state grew no worse during the first few months of his reign. Nebuchadnezzar was too much engrossed in more important affairs to give much attention to a country that had been crushed almost out of existence, and whose importance, at its best, was simply that of being the vestibule of Egypt. There seems to have grown up little by little a new national spirit in Judah. Jerusalem began to hope that Babylon was relenting, and that it would be but a short time before the captives should return and the heroic Jehoiachin be reinstated on the throne whose safety he had purchased at so great a price.

How Zedekiah regarded these possibilities, we cannot of course say; for outwardly he remained loyal to his master,

kept his oaths, and even went himself to Babylon. But submission and embassies failed to bring the national hopes to realization. Nebuchadnezzar had not relented, and Zedekiah returned to Jerusalem chafing under the humiliation of newly enforced oaths of fealty. From this time the influence of Jeremiah, which had been considerable in the royal councils, weakened, and that of the war party increased.

Hardly had Zedekiah returned when he was approached by ambassadors from various neighboring cities and urged to head a revolt. The young king hesitated. On the one hand, Jeremiah urged in the name of Jehovah that he fulfil his pledges to Babylon; while on the other, Hananiah just as strongly, and with similar claims of divine inspiration, urged the policy of the priests and princes that he join the league of cities and form an alliance with Egypt. The king gave no answer for months. Jeremiah meantime grew more and more unpopular with the court; the captives at Babylon plotted incessantly; the hatred of foreign control, so intense in Jewish hearts, fanned the passion for war; and at last, in wilful disregard of the divine warnings, Zedekiah yielded, entered into an offensive and defensive alliance with Egypt, and with the rebellious cities prepared to throw off the yoke of Babylon.

It was an impolitic, a fatal decision. Assyria had indeed fallen. Egypt and Tyre, Judah's old enemies, were now allies; but the new empire was already mighty, its master in the flood of victory: while defeat meant to Zedekiah not, as to his independent predecessors, capitulation and loss, but the punishment due a rebel nation, — annihilation.

Nebuchadnezzar immediately turned his attention to his southwest frontier. The conspiracies of the Jewish captives, and the poor kingdom of Judah, had been of little importance; but the combination of Judah with Tyre, Sidon, Moab, Ammon, Edom, and Egypt, threatened the permanence of

his conquests. He took the field in person. For a moment he seems to have hesitated whether to attack first Jerusalem or Rabboth of the Ammonites, and with the superstitious faith of the times looked to divination. In the vivid language of Ezekiel, who was doubtless in the crowd that watched the departure of the army, "The king of Babylon stood at the head of the two ways to use divination; he made his knives bright, he consulted the teraphim, he looked in the liver." The priests declared for the road that led to Judah, and to Jerusalem he marched.

The siege had but just begun when aid arrived from Egypt. The forces of Nebuchadnezzar were now in danger of being attacked while divided, and for a moment it seemed as if Jerusalem was saved. But Nebuchadnezzar suddenly raised the siege, marched rapidly to the south, struck panic into the Egyptian forces, routed them, and on the tenth day of the tenth month of the ninth year of King Zedekiah, — 587 B. C., — his generals once more invested Jerusalem. From this time to the end of the tragedy the condition of the besieged grew more and more desperate. The Babylonian army closed ever more tightly about the city, until only the corner of the wall toward Jericho was left open. The suburbs were destroyed, to give room for the enormous mounds on which were built fortifications overhanging those of the capital. The battering rams and all the other kinds of siege artillery, with which Nebuchadnezzar seems to have been well supplied, beat incessantly upon the walls. Distress increased within the city. Jeremiah, who continually advised surrender, has left terrible pictures of the condition of its inhabitants. The nobles, who in former days had prided themselves upon their fair complexions and polished skin, grew black and scrawny from hunger; high-born men and women searched the dunghills for food; mothers devoured their own children.

At last human endurance failed, and the city fell. Zedekiah, pursued by the forces that had besieged his capital, rushed into the arms of the troops stationed to intercept his flight. The wretched man was carried to Nebuchadnezzar at Riblah, where were the headquarters of the invading armies. Nebuchadnezzar reproached him for ingratitude in addition to perfidy, and passed characteristic sentence. Zedekiah was forced to see his nobles and sons killed before his eyes, and was then blinded. Afterward he was sent a prisoner to Babylon, where he probably died, — reconciling in his death the apparently contradictory prophecies of Ezekiel and Jeremiah, that he should not see Babylon, and yet that he should die there.

The rest of the story is soon told. Nebuzar-adan, the chief of the Babylonian generals, sacked Jerusalem, pillaged the temple, broke down the great walls, and drove most of the leading citizens into captivity. A few of the humbler people of the cities and many of the country-folk were left to till the ground and pay the inevitable tax. Judah ceased to be of political importance, the Jews disappeared in the exile, and Jerusalem became a desolation and a wailing place.

Such is an outline of the catastrophe that led Judah into captivity. The Jews that came back from Babylon something less than seventy years later were to show, in their new zeal for the law and in their hatred of idolatry, the blessing that lay hid in their fathers' misery. This we cannot anticipate; it will be enough for us to discover the fulfilment of God's word in the fall of the house of David.

The final exposition of the teaching of history is always difficult, but biblical history yields itself so readily to the expositor as to add a peculiar embarrassment, — unreality. The records of the Israelites have been so overlaid with "accommodating" and allegorizing interpretation as to become in many people's minds little more than an inspired Pilgrim's

Progress. The land itself has given terms to our religious vocabulary until it is well-nigh impossible to realize that Zion was an earthly city, and that the Jordan is not the river of death. But we grow even more confused over the history of the people themselves. The Israelites have become a body of saints and sinners chiefly intended to point morals. Virtues and vices stalk, ghostlike, under the names of Abraham and Isaac and Esau. So great is the reverence — or laziness — with which the historical books of the Old Testament are read that it is only within the circle of special students that the historical sense is in the least serviceable. But it will no longer do to dwell continually on the typical nature of Israel's rise and fall, or to make the nation the centre of the historical universe. The student of the Scriptures must learn to judge of Israel's history as he judges of any nation's history. God works in every land; no people are outside his control. Were there inspired men to set them forth, there are as many lessons to be learned from the fall of Richmond as from the fall of Jerusalem. But right here lies the characteristic inspiration of the sacred writer. His eyes were opened, and he saw the hills all crowded with the angelic chariots; to him there was no such thing as law, there was only Jehovah working his will in every deed of man. He treated events, not from the standpoint of the modern writer, but from that of faith. He was not scientific, but religious.

How true and helpful such a method is, every reader of the Bible can testify. No one would exchange the constant recognition of Jehovah's presence in human affairs for all the philosophy in the world. But there is no need of such exchange. The modern conception of God in history is no less true than that of David and Samuel. God works by law just as certainly as by special providence.

If we come to the fall of Jerusalem with the desire to see not merely a special judgment of God, but to gain lessons from the operation of what are commonly called natural causes, we shall discover three facts to which it was largely due.

1. *Bad economic conditions.* Judah fell into the hands of the Babylonians because her kings had wasted her resources. David gave a united nation to Solomon, who in turn passed it, still entire, to Rehoboam. Under this its fourth king the nation was broken into two hostile kingdoms. The narrative gives the cause explicitly, — unendurable taxation. The glory of Solomon, his navy and palaces and harem and chariots, had been purchased at the price of great suffering on the part of the people. Had Rehoboam followed the advice of his older counsellors and lightened taxation, Jeroboam would never have become his rival, and the confederation of the twelve tribes, none too strong at best, would not have wasted its strength in civil war.

The unwise policy of the wisest of men was maintained by too many of his successors. The capital grew statelier, but the people grew poorer. Even under a good king, like Hezekiah, the wealth of the nation was drained to provide for the magnificence and the vanity of the court, while after the defeat of Josiah and the imposition of the Egyptian tribute Jehoiakim still expended money lavishly in beautifying his capital.

In addition to all this the people suffered from rich commoners. Isaiah is full of the oppression of great merchants and usurers. The Mosaic law of land-tenure seems to have fallen into disuse, and the wealthy built up enormous estates, joining field to field in disregard of the ancient landmarks. The interests of the poorer classes were sacrificed to monopolies in linen and flax; indirect taxation increased all financial burdens; and, as in the Famine Pact in France, the

king and court unrighteously controlled the supply of grain.

It is not surprising, therefore, that the nation grew daily weaker, and that society sank into the two antagonistic classes of the very rich and the very poor. Still less is it surprising that, in default of reformation, the kingdom should fall. Other nations have passed through the same crisis, in almost every case to the same end. Nothing brings calamity so quickly as iniquitous business regulations. Men will lay down their fortunes and their lives for their country, but neither imprisonment nor death can make them submit quietly to its oppressive taxation or compulsory sales or bad money. Judah suffered from so much bad government as to be utterly unable to withstand her enemies. The best of her kings seem to have failed in this adjustment of their needs to their people's capacity. As Oriental tyrants they owned their subjects, and gave little attention to what we now regard as one of the foundations of a nation's progress, — finance.

2. *Moral degeneracy.* But back of the bad financial policy of the nation lay its moral weakness. For a nation whose God was Jehovah, the Jews were wonderfully prone to idolatry. If we except a few years of David's reign, there was not a moment, from the Call to the Return, when Israel was not itching to run after strange gods. Solomon was a typical eclectic in religion, permitting heathen divinities to be worshipped by the side of his great temple. The reforms of such kings as Hezekiah and Josiah were short-lived, and served but to set in strange contrast the popular worship in the high places and the groves. In fact, hardly had Josiah been carried to his burial when many of the leaders of Jerusalem, as if in despair of Jehovah's accomplishing anything in the face of the divinities of the Egyptians, openly turned heathen. No one can read the scolding sentences of Ezekiel upon



Samaria and Jerusalem without gaining a conception of the half-heartedness with which the Jews worshipped Jehovah.

In this desertion of their God the Jews deserted all moral restraints. The worship of Thammuz and Astarte and Baal was licentious and degrading. The lofty morality that should have characterized the followers of the Mosaic code gave way to the love of Oriental orgies. Instead of trusting in Jehovah, Judah turned to the chariots of Egypt. The manly vigor that had belonged to the Israel of David's time was utterly wanting in the court of Zedekiah. As in Rome and Macedon in later times, the national character had become so depraved as to be quite beyond ordinary cure. God let decay eat at the nation's life for centuries, and then, when all other means were impotent, sent the Babylonians and the captivity.

3. *Disregard of religious teachers.* Nothing is more dramatic than the struggle between the prophets and the kings of Israel. Samuel with the gigantic Saul cowering at his feet; Elijah defying Ahab, slaying the prophets of Baal, and running from Jezebel; Elisha travelling up and down a half-converted land; Isaiah outspoken and dying a martyr's death; Jeremiah deep in the filth of his prison, — are but leaders in the noble army of prophets whom God sent to guide Israel through the paths of national success, in the face of the bitterest opposition. Each of them was faithful and spoke his message; but his words passed unheeded, or only excited anger and persecution. Neither people nor king cared to follow the stern words of their religious teachers, except as they were threatened by some overwhelming disaster. Then, perhaps, for a few days or months, the worship of Jehovah was reinstated in its proper place, and the prophetic office was again honored.

The unwillingness of the Jews to follow the teaching of their prophets was due in large measure to the nature of that

teaching itself. It would be a mistake to consider miracles and the seeing of visions the chief business of the prophets. Few of them were gifted with these powers. Their office was not so much fore-speaking as for-speaking. They were men who spoke in God's stead, and a study of their utterances will show that the chief objects with which they were concerned were questions of national importance. They were untitled, and often hated, counsellors of state; and the advice they gave was by no means always religious, in the narrower sense of the word. The declaration of war, the anointing of kings, the manumission of slaves, the oppression of the poor by the rich,—these are but a few of the topics upon which the prophets spoke quite as frequently as upon the matter of sacrifices and feast-days. In other words, the prophets dealt with questions of the day, with living issues, and dared to apply religion to the affairs of the world that now is. Had they been less searching preachers, their lives would have been more comfortable. Jeremiah might have gone down to Anathoth and died in peace, had he been content to dwell on the beauties of righteousness in the abstract, and said nothing about the duty of a king's keeping his word; Elijah might have had a deal more hopeful view of life, had he been content to attack covetousness and not a covetous king. Had Jeremiah, just before the fall of Jerusalem, been content to speak apocalyptically of a Deliverer who was to come centuries later, the opposition to his words would have been far more surprising; it would also have been far more excusable. The wickedness of a man appears in his unwillingness to apply God's words to special sins far more than in his indifference to heaven. Many a man who will listen contentedly to what he falsely calls "the Gospel," will express himself very vigorously against any preacher who dares touch on the employer's treatment of his workmen.

Judah here is the type of the world. Had its king listened to God's servants, the nation would have weathered its financial distress and been cured of its wickedness. In their words lay the only hope; and Judah laughed at them and stoned them. Jerusalem, the Zion of David, became the execution city of the prophets. Judah fell, just as any nation will fall that fails to apply religion to national problems.

We to-day are confronted with many of the same questions that confronted and conquered Judah. The social condition of our people will sooner or later bring revolution or readjustment. Our one hope lies in Christ's teachings. If our religious leaders will take up the mantles of the prophets, and in endeavoring to fit men for heaven fit them for earth; if Christ indeed becomes the King of kings and controller of business, — we may hope for a peaceable settlement of the difficulty that is so close upon us. But God help us if, neglecting his Word, we let affairs work out their own cure; if our religious teachers deal only with the questions of centuries that are past; if Christ's words are pushed into the mummy-cases of dogmatics, and Christianity becomes indeed mere "other-worldliness."

The one great lesson of the Captivity of Judah is this: the fearless application of Christianity to living questions is the duty of both clergy and laymen, and the hope of the state.



THE THIRD QUARTER.



STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

LESSON

- |       |           |     |  |
|-------|-----------|-----|--|
| I.    | July      | 5.  | "The Word made Flesh." By the EDITOR.                            |
| II.   | "         | 12. | "Christ's First Disciples." By Rev. Professor<br>BUNYAN SPENCER. |
| III.  | "         | 19. | "Christ's First Miracle." By Rev. W. R. L.<br>SMITH.             |
| IV.   | "         | 26. | "Christ and Nicodemus." By Rev. E. C. DAR-<br>GAN, D. D.         |
| V.    | August    | 2.  | "Christ at Jacob's Well." By Rev. Professor<br>R. S. COLWELL.    |
| VI.   | "         | 9.  | "Christ's Authority." By Rev. JOHN HUMPS-<br>STONE, D. D.        |
| VII.  | "         | 16. | "The Five Thousand Fed." By Rev. Professor<br>JOHN M. ENGLISH.   |
| VIII. | "         | 23. | "Christ the Bread of Life." By Rev. FRANCIS<br>BELLAMY.          |
| IX.   | "         | 30. | "Christ at the Feast." By Rev. O. P. GIFFORD.                    |
| X.    | September | 6.  | "The True Children of God." By Rev. W. H. P.<br>FAUNCE.          |
| XI.   | "         | 13. | "Christ and the Blind Man." By Rev. P. S.<br>MOXOM.              |
| XII.  | "         | 20. | "Christ the Good Shepherd." By Rev. HENRY<br>M. KING, D. D.      |

## Lesson I. July 5.

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### THE WORD MADE FLESH.

*John i: 1-18.*

By THE EDITOR.

A WORD may be defined as “expressed reason.” Brutes utter noises; young children use tones; men, as rational, speak words. God too, the Supreme Reason, has his Word. The Son, conceived as expressing the thought of God, is spoken of in scripture as the “Word,” the “Word of God.” This is his name when he is considered as existing before creation; for even then he bore to the Deity the relation of Thought-Revealer, mirroring back to the divine mind its own ideas. He was Thought-Revealer in creating the universe, for in that act he pictured to God’s mind its own eternal thought-ideal in outward form; and in the sustenance of the universe he is the Revealer of divine ideas to man also.

Most completely did the Son expose the Father’s mind in becoming incarnate. All the fulness of the Godhead dwelt bodily in him. He was the embodied lustre of the Father’s glory, the very image of his being. In all the characteristics of love and grace, those who saw Christ saw the Father also. He was God’s Representative.

This is the pith of our lesson to-day: that this Word of God, who had existed through all preceding ages as pure spirit, by and by became flesh and entered into humanity. He became human in the broadest and fullest sense. In that



mortal frame which passed up and down the Holy Land, now sitting wearied at the well of Sychar, now asleep in the fishing-smack upon Tiberias water, at last gashed, bloody, and dead on the cross, abode a self-hood at once divine and human, the two characters so blending that the single consciousness to which both reported could make out no line where the one ended and the other began. Jesus was perfectly divine; Jesus was perfectly human.

Christians nowadays need to dwell most upon his humanity. We propose no fresh proof of this, any more than of his divinity. Were that our aim we should detail not mainly the Lord's genuine experience of heat and cold, hunger and thirst, for bodily vicissitudes form but a small factor in the life of a real man. We should dwell rather upon his temptations, upon his racy sarcasm in those wordy jousts with the Pharisees, and upon his peculiarly human liking for John and the villagers of Bethany. But Christ's humanity needs no proof, for it has been agreed to, with very insignificant exceptions, in every age, sect, and department of the Church. We wish to study these verses the more helpfully to see the deep significance of what we already believe, to get thoughts which the Holy Ghost may use to thrill us with a new and delicious sense of the actual brotherhood of Jesus to us, one and all. Let us try to feel this.

But if you do try, you will not find it easy. Obstacles will oppose. Foremost among them, perhaps, will be the sinlessness of Christ. How can the great Sinless One sympathize with a sinner? I believe that a true view will enable us to see how even Christ's freedom from sin does not prevent the most tender and sympathetic relations between him and us.

Christ never had the sin-produced experiences that we have had. He never was, as each of us has been, the subject of self-condemnation for sin. His conscience put forth no

retributive energy ; hence the smart of its bite he cannot share with us.

Nor did Christ ever have to resist evil with heart half in sympathy with evil. This dreadful doubleness of moral experience, this fierce internal combat between the old man and the new, the blessed Christ never passed through. In us goodness must fight as a soldier who has been routed a thousand times already. In Christ it was a champion that had often fought before, and been dreadfully hard pressed too, but never once beaten.

It is plain, besides, that certain low and grovelling temptations beset most of us which Christ could never feel. It is sometimes asserted that a perfectly holy being cannot be tempted at all, that either Christ was not holy, or else his temptations were a sham. Not so. There is no necessary incompatibility between holiness and genuine temptation, and we feel such to exist only when we have in mind temptations of a mean and degrading sort. Christ, holy as he was, was tempted, or else Scripture is false ; but he was never tempted to imbrute his body with strong drink, or to lie, or to steal, or to be a hypocrite, or not to pay his honest debts.

For all this, Jesus Christ knew with its whole ineffable bitterness what it is to fight sin. He entered the contest with armor intact, but what followed was real war. And does not this towering truth put a heart of genuineness into our Saviour's brotherhood to us ? Must one have gone as deeply into sin as I to possess very sympathy with me in my struggles against it ? Need a runner in the race have fainted in order to know what powers of endurance it requires to run ? May not an old campaigner gauge the ache of the wounds he has seen, without being rent with them all upon his own person ? Yes ; and so can the sinless Christ enter into sympathy with me. We both attacked Apollyon, — he with stanch

weapons, I with broken ones. He beat the foe, I was beaten. Still my divine Comrade in the battle will not despise me because I fell. He remains my Comrade, though a better valor sustained him, and his contest issued in victory.

Another block to our due apprehension of the Lord's humanity is the fact that while he was human he was something besides,— he was divine; and since his comprehensive personality is not compound, but absolutely simple, it is hard to analyze it and hold up either factor to the gaze so as to see its whole perfection and beauty. We have been schooled to do that, as best we can, with his divinity, because this has been matter of controversy, and those who have maintained it at all have regarded it the chief essence of his being. It is so. There is no danger of our exalting the Lord's divinity any too much absolutely. Yet relatively we may. The personality being so spiritual, a transcendent element seems, in spite of us, to run through the whole of it. As in all the master-paintings of Jesus a supernatural sweetness and dignity possess the features, so when you try to fix your mind upon what is human in his character, a glory from the higher nature settles down upon the lower and makes all you see seem more than earthly.

What are we to do? Shall we be content to think of him whom "it behooved to be made in all things like his brethren," nevermore as brother? Shall we regard the "Friend of Sinners" so named only to mock us? Were the scriptural representations of the Lord's humanity constructed to deceive us? And are we forever to deny ourselves the uplift of full communion with the heart of Jesus because it beats in part with a life that is not of this world? God forbid! The Church has been doing this too long. Contending for his divinity, we have as good as denied his humanity. Maintaining his power to win us eternal life, we have forgotten how he can sweeten and exalt the life

that now is. Half of our moral weakness and meanness takes rise just here, that we put Jesus too high above us. Far from seeming our Brother, he is a mysterious and incredible Form, like some demigod of Homeric song.

We perversely exaggerate the difference between the divine and the human, till it is no wonder that people who are strongly convinced of the one deny the other. The two are alike in nature. They are not diverse kinds, but one. God's being is of a piece with our own, for he is our Father, and we exist in his image. The difference is that he is infinite, while we are finite. He is spirit; so are we. Each of our faculties is a miniature of the like in him. The newest studies upon this subject — and they are the deepest ever made — are showing us that we have been too fearful of anthropomorphism in likening God to man. To think of the great God as actually personal, sensitive, and in some sense changeable, is not to accuse his nature of imperfection, but rather to exalt its perfection. Not contradictory but most natural is this doctrine of Christ as the God-man bringing heaven and earth together, veritable Son of the Eternal, yet so near to us as to represent ideal humanity better than the choicest mere child of earth could do.

Nothing is more vicious in making Christ's person seem strange and unreal than the false feeling, too common, that somehow his actions were determined by iron necessity laid upon him, instead of springing from free volitions of his own. Christ was not under law to a holy fate. He had his own probation to fulfil, his "charge to keep," as truly as Adam or any son of Adam. The purpose of God held no harder hand on him than is on you and me. He did right because he would do right. He refrained from wrong, not as prevented by the eternal fiat of God, but to answer the voluntary dictates of a pure heart. Let us not slander him. He lived better than we simply by the power

of a stronger will and a more perfect virtue, not because fated to be good. He was as free as you are. He might have sinned had he so willed. He would not; he girded up his soul and freely spurned every evil solicitation. Oh, if we oftener placed Christ's probation before our minds as the experience of a struggling but victorious human being, and ceased fancying him to have been good because compelled, his religion would soon become more a reality to us than we have ever known it.

Christ's divinity was in the background in other experiences than his temptations. Except in special crises of his Messianic work, he ignored it continually. I believe that it was always present and active, giving character to his every deed, however humble; but the peculiar energy of it was not put forth always. When Jesus gave back life to the dead, or healed sickness, or read thoughts in the depths of men's hearts, then divinity acted; but no special power from heaven aided him to bear weariness or hunger or thirst, or braced him for any of his proper probationary conflicts. In most of his career all that appeared was the mysterious, tender-hearted, holy man. He retired his formal divinity from view, that men might see and believe him human, as he was. Let us do the same, if need be; it will not grieve but please him.

To grasp this doctrine of Christ's divine humanity, of his full citizenship in this world as well as in the other, supplants many a vain conceit, common among Christian people, with a truly inspiring conception.

1. The Incarnation was no afterthought of God, no appendix or codicil to the divine plan, but piece of God's eternal programme for man. Least of all can sin claim the glory of occasioning it. Guiltless humanity would not have been perfect humanity. It would have required to advance from strength to strength and from beauty to beauty, even as

Christ himself did while on earth ; and in this it would have needed his inspiration and guidance. Christ must have come sooner or later to stand upon the earth, had every human being, from creation down, been as holy as he. Jesus was not a necessity simply in order to atone for sin. In no event could our race have been complete without him for its head. Can any one suppose that God would have kept back his most splendid work simply because no depravity attacked our ancestors ? Does Satan deserve thanks for tempting Eve, that she might fall, and call for the Restorer ? Nay ! The second Adam was as truly part of the normal divine order as the first. Sin having appeared, his actual mission was of course changed. Now it meant humiliation, the cross, death, — all which the Son of God might have been spared, but for the advent of evil. But the Incarnation itself, the special personal effulgence of the Father's glory here on earth, the epiphany of matchless spiritual excellence in a human form, devout thought can hardly imagine not to have taken place.

2. Again, the Incarnation accords with a true doctrine of the divine procedure in every department of creation. It is not, as many seem to suppose, a great exception to God's ordinary way of working, jarring with the methods of science and of history ; quite the reverse. I abhor all thought of a mindless or atheistic evolution : that is the belief only of ill-trained and unfurnished heads. But with evolution taken in the proper sense, as the gradual mode by which it has pleased God to bring things to pass, the Christian Incarnation-doctrine has no quarrel. Many of the thinkers who reason about Jesus as joining naturally on to the humanity which was before him, have been unduly censured. What they say, if understood rightly, is precisely true. Actual, practical humanity, whether ancient or modern, of course cannot account for the Supreme Man ; but of ideal human-

ity, of mankind as it existed in God's thought, and as God was little by little bringing it to manifestation, he was the perfectly natural fruit, taking his place upon the family tree as normally as Shakspeare or Henry George.

3. Once more, no conception and no estimate of mankind is adequate or just which omits Jesus Christ. We speak of humanity as fickle, frail, prone to go astray, sinful, vile, so many children of the Devil. Such speech expresses a truth when it refers to men taken as they come. Applied to humanity in the proper sense it is a stupendous criminal libel. Do not judge San Francisco by the hoodlums. The thugs are not India. And pray never commit the error of regarding the human beings to whom so many hard names can be applied, as comprising humanity. The true notion of mankind takes in Jesus. The actual value of humanity is common humanity *plus* Jesus Christ. He belongs to it as truly as Socrates, Gustavus Adolphus, or William Kemmler. He was no naturalized citizen of earth, but born here. Indict the race as you will. You can set forth a very long account against it, — sad, serious, most compromising. One item is Cæsar Borgia, another is Captain Kidd; I am a third, you are a fourth. Put them all down, do not omit any, black though the page may be. But, O book-keeper, critic, censor of thy kind, I adjure thee by the sacred majesty of truth, write up the credit page as well! Write Saint Paul's name upon it. Enter Judson there. Enter John Henry Newman on that page. Enter Marcus Aurelius, Alfred the Great, George Washington. But at the top of it, in letters of living light which at once God, all on earth, even the blind, all men, angels, and devils can read, write that Name which is above every name! It belongs there, and it will go far to balance the account. I can never admit that sin is a good, or even a necessary concomitant of good. But this I believe, that a sinning humanity, with Jesus for



its Masterpiece and Redeemer, is a finer thing than a sinless humanity with no Jesus could ever have been.

4. Lastly, we have a right — yes, we are in duty bound — to allow for Jesus Christ in all our calculations about what humanity may hope to become. Do not despair of a family of rude children so long as they have a discreet and saintly mother. You defame the family not to account her a part of it; she is in fact the main part. There is hope in praying for the state so long as it contains a remnant of godly men. They help to make it up and to give it its character. The rank and file of your army may be raw and timid. Never mind; if their general is a Napoleon, victory is before them, and it will be the army's victory, for he helped compose the army.

Many moral evils compass our modern society about. The outlook for progress is in various ways most discouraging. At some points our course is retrograde. Social and private sins, as contrasted with crimes of violence, are undoubtedly on the increase. Thinking of the human race, its vices and its tendencies in our time, the sage queries to himself oftener than he likes to say it loud, —

“ Is the great flock  
For the good Balder, or the evil Lok ? ”

In numerous of its worst phases, our age exactly resembles that which preceded the breaking up of the old Roman Empire. Many thoughtful persons are at this moment in terror of some signal social paroxysm like that. And it may come. God may please again to purify the air by a cyclone, or to heave up continents of rich loam by an earthquake. But there is one incalculable difference between the civilized society of to-day and that of the ancient world when about to be dissolved. *We have Christ, and they had not.* Humanity has been reinforced. This not only by the accession of

Jesus himself, but by the wide dissemination of his type of mankind. Lifted up, Christ will draw all men his way. I smile when, at missionary gatherings, zealous brethren speak as if expecting the world's conversion to be finished in five, ten, or fifteen years. If it is done in as many centuries I shall wear out my psaltery and harp in praise. But there is a pessimism which is quite as senseless as that over-sanguine faith. The bed-rock forces of our universe make for righteousness. In undertaking the conquest of earth, Messiah knew what he could depend on. Central fact in history, decisive of man's salvation, — he came. How the tide of war changed at Winchester when soldier said to soldier, "Sheridan is here!"

At the battle of Sadowa, July 3, 1866, when the pickets closed in the morning, Von Moltke saluted King William and said, "To-day your Majesty will win not only the battle, but the campaign." At noon it did not seem so. Prince Frederick Charles's corps were withering under the hottest artillery fire of this century save that at Gettysburg, just three years earlier to the hour. In a few minutes they must give way. Hark! what means this cheering on the left? New cannons boom, and the Austrian fire slackens. Ah! Von Moltke knows. The Crown Prince has arrived with his fresh corps. He has stormed the heights of Chlum; he enfilades the whole Austrian line; Benedek is beaten; on, on to Vienna; the war is ended!

Brothers, let us away bravely, each to his place in Jehovali's hosts! Our Crown Prince, with fresh forces right from heaven, has reached the field.

## Lesson II. July 12.

### CHRIST'S FIRST DISCIPLES.

*John i: 29-42.*

BY REV. PROFESSOR BUNYAN SPENCER, OAKLAND, CAL.

THE lowly Nazarene is about to begin in a public manner the work of the world's redemption. The Son of God has become a brother to the sons of men: Deity is veiled in humanity. The people are waiting for a deliverer, and have waited long; but so humble is his arrival that his person and his presence are unknown. Some one is needed to introduce him. This master of ceremonies is not to be self-appointed or a creature of circumstances. God has chosen and sent him. Through Malachi Jehovah has declared, "Behold, I will send my messenger, and he shall prepare the way before me; and the Lord, whom ye seek, shall suddenly come." The wisdom and forethought of God in guiding this world's affairs can easily be discovered in many things; but nowhere are they clearer than in his preparation for the salvation of men from sin. There is no emergency for which God is not prepared. Never has he to resort to any hasty adjustment to meet unforeseen circumstances. His work for ages had been to make ready and to foretell. Hundreds of years before had it been said that one should introduce the coming deliverer. The hour has now arrived, and both Messiah and his messenger are ready.

Under what title shall the visitor from Heaven be announced? Much thought and skill have often been employed in introducing great personages to strangers. To what artifice of speech shall this herald betake himself, that he may duly reveal the character of him whom he presents? Ah, how simple, yet how full of meaning! "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Doubtless no time was spent in selecting this expression, yet the thought was not a mere intellectual flash. Even the figure of speech was inspired of God. Should any one deem it natural for a Levite to speak thus, the reply is that God had chosen a Levite to be the speaker. Whether John saw in Christ the antitype of the passover lamb, of the daily sacrifice, or of the sacrifices in general, or simply "the lamb led to the slaughter," as described by Isaiah, the idea was from on high. John was of course familiar with the prophecy of Isaiah; but that the form of the announcement was dependent on that prophet's words is by no means evident. John might have spoken as he did had he never heard Isaiah's language, for he himself was a prophet not a whit inferior to any that had preceded him. So clear is Isaiah's portrayal of Jehovah's Servant, some have supposed that his prophecy must have been written after Christ's appearance on earth; but there is abundant ground for thinking John's prevision more vivid even than Isaiah's. Is it not rational to believe that Isaiah and John used the same figure for the same reason? Why should we undertake to distinguish between the lamb spoken of by Isaiah and the antitype of the sacrifices? The typical significance of the sacrifices in Isaiah, and the announcement of John, embody the same idea, that of Christ as the Sin-Bearer for all men. Every one of the divinely appointed sacrifices was in some way prophetic of Christ. These oblations which the priests oftentimes offered could never take away sins. Christ gave himself as

the one sacrifice that should be effective forever. Our minds turn naturally from John Baptist's words to the question of Isaac, "Where is the lamb for a burnt offering?" and to the reply of Abraham, "God will provide himself a lamb for a burnt offering."

The Baptist's message adds the purpose of the great arrival. The Redeemer, the Lamb of God, comes to earth to "take," to "take up," to "take away," to "conquer" the world's sin,—by all these phrases is the word at times rendered in Scripture. Jesus Christ will expiate human sin; but he will do more, he will remove it, rid us of it, make men holy, perfect, fit for heaven. Not only the word, but the form in which it stands, is significant: it means that the Lamb offers himself voluntarily for this service to humanity. It is not forced upon him. He loves his own who are in the world, infected by its evil, and graciously stoops to compass their deliverance.

What is "the sin of the world"? It includes the taint which we derive from our original ancestor. "As in Adam all die, so in Christ shall all be made alive." But it involves much more than this. All the actual sin, guilt, and depravity of our nature is to be completely vanquished through this infinite sacrifice, so that the lost world shall need no other. The Christ alone makes an all-sufficient atonement. He does not come to purge us of particular sins or guilt, but to purify our nature utterly, to "take away" its evil, to exalt to his throne all who will believe on his name.

"Not all the blood of beasts  
On Jewish altars slain  
Could give the guilty conscience peace,  
Or wash away the stain.

"But Christ the heavenly Lamb  
Takes all our sins away:  
A sacrifice of nobler name  
And richer blood than they."

Let us turn for a moment to consider the witness who makes this surprising announcement. Prophet after prophet had spoken, declaring that some time in the distant future the Messiah would come. Every sacrifice in the Mosaic ritual foretold the offering that was to be. The many elements in Messiah's character had been set forth in various ways, the prophets adding each his item or trait to fill out the sublime description. But no one had before seen him ready to enter upon his mission. To no one hitherto had the right been given to say, This is he. Whence such a power in mortal man to recognize the Saviour of the world, to look through the veil which darkens the vision of humanity and understand the plan of God, seeing and declaring, Behold, all things are ready? Remember, those matchless discourses of Christ had not yet been spoken; his mighty works remained unwrought. The demons had not gone forth; the blind eyes, the deaf ears, were still closed; the waves of Tiberias had not yet heard the "Peace, be still!" nor had Lazarus come forth from the grave. The sun had not hidden in darkness at our Lord's suffering, nor had he as yet led death in triumph at his chariot-wheel. To the eyes of the world he is not the Son of God, nor even a prophet, he is simply a young carpenter from Nazareth.

But the courage to proclaim Messiah was, if possible, more wonderful than the vision to recognize him. Who shall stand forth, and singling out with the index finger this as yet unknown Coming One, bid the unbelieving world "Behold the Lamb of God"? Go ask that doubting Christian, afraid to testify for Christ even amidst his followers, at this late day in the world's history, familiar with those words which mere man never spake, and with the old, old story of those deeds which mere man never wrought, still hesitating though each succeeding generation has been heaping testimony upon testimony for the truth of Christ's claims,—

after sceptics have been convinced, after martyrs by thousands have shed their blood for the truth, after the Nazarene has been in so many ways crowned "King of kings and Lord of lords," when nearly the whole world has come to regard the once-despised cross as a badge of honor, — go ask such a Christian, who can scarcely tear himself from his seat to rise and mumble something about "taking up his cross," whether he was not a hero who led the van, and without waiting for the pledge of one supporter, gave forth the lonely but telling testimony that still rings down the ages, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world." Like a mountain overtopping molehills is the character of John as a witness in comparison with that of many professing witnesses for Christ in our day.

What was the basis upon which the faith of the Baptist rested as he sounded out the announcement that the Saviour of the world was at hand? Did he merely have confidence in the correctness of his own calculations touching the times and seasons spoken of by the prophets? Did he put together the harmonious declarations of the seers and his own personal knowledge of Jesus, and conclude, This is he? Did he from the summit of human intelligence scan, like a lone astronomer, the horizon, and discover the first glinting of the rays of the Morning Star? Nay, not by human knowledge, but by the eye of God-given faith did John see Jesus as Him who should come. Hear his own declaration, uttered and reiterated, "I knew him not." Some have supposed from this that John had no acquaintance with Christ, though living near him and according to the flesh personally related to him. The truth seems rather to have been this: John studied and believed the prophets. He himself had already preached that the kingdom of heaven was at hand. He was in all probability acquainted with Jesus, and impressed with his marvellous piety and gifts. But to his all-



absorbing inquiry, Is this, after all, the one "of whom Moses in the law and the prophets did write"? human wisdom gave him no answer. God furnished the reply by a direct revelation. John had been instructed to wait for a sign,—the dove, visible symbol of the Holy Spirit, descending and alighting on Christ's person. He saw, believed, and made proclamation accordingly.

The results of this were both general and specific, both mediate and immediate. Andrew and another of John's disciples followed Jesus at once. Both became chosen apostles. Andrew presently brought to Christ his own brother, Simon Peter, who became the leader among the disciples both before and after the resurrection. The testimony given by John the Baptist would have been a work "on ages telling," even if it had effected nought else than to bring Andrew, his fellow-disciple, and Peter to believe on the Lord Jesus. Not to the preaching of angels, but to the testimony of men, has God committed the winning of this world to Christ. Some one has said that the greatest work Andrew ever did was to bring his brother Peter to the Lord. This action and its effect were dependent on the witness of John. Who knows, my brother, what mighty servant of God may be called into the Lord's work by your testimony? Let us speak out with ringing words, and tell the story of the Christ and his love while we may. "They overcame by the blood of the Lamb and by the word of their testimony."

Jesus was to baptize with the Holy Spirit,—the chief characteristic of his ministry. This truth of our lesson sweeps our thought onward past the cross, past the resurrection, to Pentecost. The purpose of John's baptism in water was that Christ might be made manifest unto Israel; but Christ himself was to baptize in the Holy Spirit, and by this he was to establish beyond any reasonable doubt his claim to be the Son of God. The evidence of his divine

sonship was cumulative. His teaching and his works of power one after another added weight to the testimony already given. Many consider Christ's resurrection the last, greatest, most triumphant argument for his divinity. Nay, the resurrection was indeed an overwhelming argument, sufficient of itself to prove Christ to be very God. But it was not the final proof of this. The final proof lay in Christ's full possession of the Holy Spirit, as intimated by the dove-symbol, — the decisive criterion whereby John had first recognized the Messianic character. In Jesus as the dispenser of the Holy Spirit, both he and the other early disciples believed. So long as the Master remained on earth, his works and words attested his divinity and assured the faith of all his disciples.

But how was their confidence to be maintained when Christ should have withdrawn? How could faith be awakened in others? Even that heroic believer and man of God, John the Baptist himself, — who had testified to Christ so bravely and clearly, as we have seen, — when lodged within prison walls sent in discouragement to inquire whether Jesus was indeed the one that should come, or whether they must look for another. He did not ask in vain. God sees to it that men shall always have a sufficient warrant for their faith. The capstone proof that Jesus of Nazareth was in truth what he claimed to be, was the baptism of the disciples with the Holy Spirit. Previous to the utterance contained in our text, it had been made known to John that the Son of God would baptize in the Holy Spirit. John had publicly declared this. Again just before his ascension our Lord said to his disciples, "Ye shall be baptized with the Holy Ghost not many days hence." For this endowment of power they were to tarry in Jerusalem. When Christ had ascended, when the day of Pentecost was fully come, all things were at last ready for this climacteric evi-

dence that Jesus was God's Son. "Suddenly there came a sound from heaven as of a rushing mighty wind, and it filled all the house where they were sitting." "Cloven tongues, like as of fire, sat upon each of them." They were surrounded, they were filled with the Holy Spirit. The sound from heaven their ears heard, the tongues of fire their eyes saw, and the astonished multitude listened to languages which the speakers had never learned. A prophet could baptize in water, but who save the Son of God could thus bring heaven to his service?

How great is the error of supposing the first disciples to have been credulous, following Christ without basing their faith upon a rock foundation! To think so is to forget that those men were "slow of heart to believe." There was among them a doubting Thomas, who said, "Except I shall see in his hands the print of the nails, and put my finger in the print of the nails, and thrust my hand into his side, I will not believe." Yet this very doubter was at length so fully convinced that he exclaimed, "My Lord and my God!" The evangelist John, probably one of the first two disciples who followed Christ, well understood the need of incontrovertible evidence to establish the gospel story. In the introduction to his first epistle he refers to Christ as "that which was from the beginning, which we have heard, which we have seen with our eyes, which we have looked upon, and our hands have handled." Even after Mary had seen the Lord, the disciples were unwilling to believe her statement that he was risen. The disciples were incredulous rather than credulous; they were careful and cautious men. They left all and followed Jesus because "they were sure that he was that Christ, the Son of the living God." To John the Baptist God had given such a definite sign whereby to ascertain the Messiah that there was no room for mistake. To the apostles another sign was given, a proof still more positive, — the visible,

audible, awe-inspiring, gracious presence of God's Spirit, as foretold by prophets, as heralded by the forerunner, and as just reiterated by the Lord himself. It was not merely good evidence, it was demonstration, solid and abiding as the rock of Gibraltar.

The testimony of John the Baptist is preserved, the evidence of the first disciples is at hand ; and from that day till now every age has added to the multitude of Christ's witnesses. We may not hear the rushing sound, or see the cloven tongues as of fire, but millions of men to-day have the same Spirit calming their fears, inspiring their faith, bracing them for all manner of heroic deeds, and bearing witness with their spirits that they are the children of God. Whether this world will ever again witness a veritable pentecostal baptism of the Holy Ghost, we cannot tell and need not care ; but we know that often in revivals of religion the Holy Spirit still visits God's people with mighty power. Not a few of us have witnessed scenes like that which occurred during William Burns's preaching at Kilsyth, when as that godly man prayed in agony for the descent of the Holy Spirit upon the people, a sudden cry of "Hallelujah! he is come," arose, formalists shook with dread, and sinners cried, "O Christ, have mercy upon our souls!" God grant that such prayer for the Spirit and such answer may be witnessed in all the churches of our land, and the same glad cry rise from every congregation, "Hallelujah! he is come."

Lesson III. July 19.

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CHRIST'S FIRST MIRACLE.

*John i: 29-42.*

BY REV. W. R. L. SMITH, NASHVILLE, TENN.

HIS baptism and the temptation passed, Jesus with five disciples returns to Galilee. Bidden with them to a marriage at Cana, he makes it the occasion of the first public appearance of his ministry. This he signalized by a marvelous work: at his word water was turned into wine.

The fiercest battle of modern theology rages round the question of miracles. Opposers call miracles the chief offence of the Christian faith against the spirit of the age. Some have sought to remove the obstacle, out of very interest in the advance of Christian truth. It is not fair to denounce every denier of miracles as hostile to religion and an enemy of God, but it is true that the mistaken kindness of a friend may do as serious harm as the cruel assault of a foe.

What is a miracle? No simpler, clearer, truer definition exists than this: "A miracle is an external event brought about by the immediate agency of God." It involves, not a suspension of natural law, but an exertion of supernatural power.

In the effort to remove this offence from theology, two very powerful objections have been urged.

It has been affirmed that a miracle is impossible. Water could not be turned into wine, because that would be con-

trary to nature's law. The operation of natural law is uniform and unchangeable, and this fact excludes the possibility of a miracle. This is plausible, and has satisfied many that the account of the apostle is false.

To this objection the believer is accustomed to reply as follows: Admit a freely acting, personal God, and a miracle becomes possible. Such a Being cannot be the slave of nature's laws. Again, admit a God of love, who pities his children in their need, and a miracle becomes exceedingly probable. In the third place, the assumption of the uniformity of natural law in the sense named is groundless. Once nature was darkness. God broke this order when he said, "Let there be light." Nature was once chaos, and at his word the worlds received their frame. Uniformity was violated when God said, "Let us make man in our image." These facts, brought about by the immediate agency of God, utterly contradict the statement that a miracle is impossible.

It is also affirmed that a miracle is incredible. This is not a denial, but a doubt. Even granting that a miracle has been wrought, it would be impossible to believe it, says the opposer, for the reason that we see the uniformity of nature on the one hand, and know the fallibility of human testimony on the other. Hence it is easier to believe that twelve men were mistaken or reported falsely concerning the raising of the dead, the stilling of the storm, and the conversion of water into wine, than that the order of nature was broken.

Serious as this objection may at first appear, it also has been satisfactorily met by maintaining, first, that a personal God has wrought events which were impossible to merely natural forces; and by insisting, secondly, on a law of intellect which demands belief for a statement made by unimpeachable witnesses. Honest, cautious, intelligent men

declare that they beheld the raising of Lazarus, the stilling of the sea, and the water turned to wine. More than this, they stake their all on the truth of these facts. They endure hardness, sufferings, and death on the strength of their faith in them. Our minds are compelled to accept such testimony. It is easier to believe that the dead rose, that the storm was hushed, and that the water was changed, than to admit that James, Matthew, Peter, and John were dishonest or deluded.

The charge of the incredibility of miracles has been disproved by the fact that they are credited, and that not only by the ignorant and credulous, but by as sane and acute minds as the world has ever seen. The most logical, philosophical, and profound of men have steadfastly believed in Jesus as the Son of God, proved such by the wonders, signs, and mighty works which God wrought through him. The truth is that miracles are dubitable and credible alike. A man can doubt if he will.

The proof of miracles is abundant. Even the enemies of Christ confessed his mighty works. The doctrines of Jesus and his marvellous deeds were the two striking elements of his ministry. His enemies beheld, and were impressed with what they were best fitted to receive. The works appealed to sight, the teaching to reflection. The adversaries were better prepared to see than to reason; hence while they reject or scorn his doctrine, they with one consent admit his miracles. Had they denied them, it would have been a serious obstacle to faith. They recognized his wonders and signs, but sought to neutralize their influence by ascribing them to infernal agency. "By Beelzebub doth he cast out the unclean spirits." On the resurrection of Lazarus the chief priests and the elders called a council, saying, "What do we, seeing this man doeth many signs, and all the people will believe on him?"



But Jesus himself is our best witness. He said, "The works which my Father gave me to accomplish, the very works that I do, they bear witness that the Father hath sent me." He adds that he wrought them, not through Beelzebub, but by the finger of God. Lord, we believe. Here we rest our faith, in Jesus's consciousness of the power that wrought in himself. It is ten thousand times easier to believe that God wrought mighty wonders through him, than that he was deluded or false.

In working the miracle Jesus was careful to guard the sanctity of his power. No human being might make suggestions as to its use. This is the meaning of those strange words addressed to his mother when she announced to him the failure of the wine: "Woman, what have I to do with thee? mine hour is not yet come." This is not the language of severity or rebuke. Never was there another man so incapable as Jesus of disrespect to a mother. As he hung on the cross it was with this same word, "woman," that he addressed his mother, in committing her to the care of his beloved disciple. "What have I to do with thee?" From this time on she must know that he is not Jesus the son of Mary, but Christ the Son of God; that the time and manner of his self-revelation are not to be hastened by the longings of natural love. As regards his great work and mission, the beautiful earthly relationship has closed. In the kingdom of God, earthly relations must give place to heavenly. In the career he has just entered upon as the servant of God, her authority must not intrude. I must be about my Father's business, and in that business I have to do with him alone. So it ever is. God claims the absolute submission of our children to himself, and in this holy place he forbids the intrusion of all parental authority. Mary felt no rebuff. On the contrary, she evidently found hope in his words, for she immediately

commanded the servants, "Whatsoever he saith unto you, do it."

It passes comprehension how in the face of such scripture this precious mother could have come to be exalted to higher divine honors than her immaculate Son. To her Jesus said, while standing on the threshold of his redeeming work, Here our holy earthly relation virtually passes away. Henceforth you are to me only as other women. To-day the Romanist views her as more exalted in heaven than her adorable Son, and supplicates her to influence the use of his power in men's behalf.

"The works of early Christian art," says Robertson, "curiously exhibit the progress of this perversion. They show how mariolatry grew up. The first pictures of the early Christian ages simply represent the woman. By and by we find outlines of the mother and the child. In an after age the son is seen sitting on a throne with the mother crowned, but sitting as yet below him. In an age still later, the crowned mother on a level with the son. Later still, the mother on a throne *above* the son. And lastly, a Romish picture represents the eternal son in wrath about to destroy the earth, and the Virgin Intercessor interposing, pleading by significant attitude her maternal rights, and redeeming the world from his vengeance. Such was, in fact, the progress of virgin worship."

To the Ephesians Paul affirms that God made Christ "sit at his right hand in the heavenly places, far above all rule, and authority, and power, and dominion, and every name that is named, not only in this world, but also in that which is to come." This would almost seem to have been written expressly to guard against all possibility of such mariolatry as modern ages have witnessed; but in vain.

What was the aim of the miracle before us? "This beginning of miracles did Jesus, and manifested his glory."

As in a sudden flash of light, his nature, dignity, and mission stood disclosed. It was part of his glory that he was the Son of God. It was another part of it that he was the beloved of the Father. It was his chief glory that he came to minister to men. The honor of his sonship is thus far concealed from men. So likewise the crown of the Father's love and the amazing grace of salvation to men in and through him. The water turns to wine, and there is a brilliant attestation of his honor, a most clear manifestation of his glory.

There can be no mistake in declaring his ministry to men the very climax and crown of his glory. Laying aside his dignity, equalling that of the Father, and resigning the happiness of the heavenly places, he took on him the form of a servant and became obedient unto death. He came not to be ministered unto, but to minister. Through service and sacrifice he attained unto a glory before unknown. The true splendor of our Lord is too often misunderstood. Visions of gorgeous palaces and the pomp of regal wealth and power frequently deform our conceptions of his glory. It is not physical, but moral and spiritual; and in ministration to the humble wants of the lowly it found its noblest expression. It is the blessed Master's will that we should share in his glory. "If any man will be great among you, let him be the servant of all."

Jesus manifested his glory by his sympathy with the common joys of life. He went to the house of feasting, and mingled freely in the festivities of a marriage. On that day he sanctified forever the holy institution of marriage and the simple pleasures and joys of the people. In this he stands in striking contrast with his forerunner. John was severe in his tastes, ascetic in his habits, and kept aloof from the haunts of men. In Christ there was more tender interest in things human, and this partly explains why his ministry so soon overshadowed that of the Baptist.

Again, his glory was manifested in an act of timely helpfulness. The wine was failing, and mortification, keen and deep, threatened the family. When it failed, his hour had come, and the best wine of the feast was supplied. We are not concerned now with the use made of the fact by the friends and opposers of temperance reform. If some allege that it was not intoxicating, while others find in it a warrant for the whiskey traffic, the mistake of the first seems only paralleled by the blasphemy of the latter. Our Lord's helpfulness in a case of ordinary human need is the impressive fact. This glory he manifested when he turned the water into wine. It is a comfort to know that our common daily wants are sacred to him, and that he stands ready to deliver us from perplexity and confusion. When Jehovah came into the camp of the hungry Israelites and announced the manna, it was told them, "in the morning ye shall see the glory of God." God's helpfulness to the poor and needy is his pre-eminent glory.

What was the result of the miracle? It became the confirmation of his disciples' faith. "And his disciples believed on him." The miracle had its domestic value as a most timely relief, but its chief value lies in its weight of testimony.

There have been three epochs of miracles in the kingdom of God. The first was in the days of Moses, and it issued in the formation of the Hebrew commonwealth. The second was in the days of Elijah, resulting in the preservation of the institutions of Moses against the aggressions of heathenism. The third occurred in the days of Jesus of Nazareth, culminating in the foundation of Christianity. In these three crises it pleased God to add the indorsement of miracles to the work of his servants. He knows that faith needs to be made reasonable by having a proper basis. Hence he accredited his messengers by enduing them

with miraculous powers. Moses goes before Pharaoh with this astounding credential, — a rod which thrown down becomes a serpent, and which taken up becomes a staff again.

Jesus comes into the world displaying a multitude of signs and wonders. First in the catalogue is the miracle at Cana. Its purpose is not to prove the truth of his teaching, but to convince men that he is the sent of the Father. Nicodemus catches the idea, as his speech plainly discloses, — “we know that thou art a teacher come from God, for no man can do these signs that thou doest, except God be with him.” It is not the office of the miracle, then, to establish doctrine, but to confirm faith in the Divine Messenger. Hence it is said that, seeing this miracle, his disciples believed on him.

No man is asked to accept divine truth on the ground of miracle. That stands on its own merits, and proves itself by its adaptations to life and its needs. “Certainly,” says the objecting friend, “take the doctrine of Christ on its merits, and cast away the stumbling-blocks.” Here is a curious contrast. The ancient enemy of the Gospel admitted the fact of miracles, but rejected the teaching of Christ. Our modern friend of the Gospel believes the doctrine, but utterly revolts at the miraculous element. This honor of doctrine at the expense of miracle is absurd. If the teaching of Jesus is believed, it must be on the ground that he speaks the truth. Then the miracle must be a fact, for himself said, “I cast out demons by the finger of God.”

God has joined miracles and doctrine in the person of Jesus Christ, and no man shall ever be able to put them asunder. Lord Jesus, thou art approved to our souls by thy mighty works, thy sovereign grace, and thy suffering love! We believe that thou camest forth from God, and that believing on thee, we have forgiveness of sins and the gift of everlasting life.

## Lesson IV. July 26.

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### CHRIST AND NICODEMUS.

*John iii: 1-17.*

By REV. E. C. DARGAN, D. D., CHARLESTON, S. C.

IS God real and approachable? Is there a better existence beyond death, and is it attainable? Is there a purer life for man here, and can help be had in reaching it? In this interview between Jesus and Nicodemus these great questions are presented and discussed in a manner that must always be of fresh interest, because there are still such inquirers, and because the answers are valid eternally. Some persons, for one reason or another, ignore these deep questions. Others naively judge them incapable of answer, accounting it idle to spend time on them. Others approach them with keen curiosity and real personal interest, their minds, however, clouded by wrong prepossessions and timid through doubt. The last have a spokesman in Nicodemus; they receive emphatic and final answer in Christ's replies and instructions to him. In this interview, then, is set before us

#### THE HUMAN INQUIRY.

Nicodemus's very approach challenges notice. He comes by night, — probably because he preferred that the interview should be private. He seems to have some fear lest he compromise himself in the eyes of his associates by seeking light on religious questions from such a source as Jesus. Yet he comes. He brings, too, a certain amount of

conviction. "Rabbi, we know that thou art a teacher from God." Here is respect for the person of Jesus, and a certain belief in the divine origin and character of his work.

There are inquirers of just this sort among us to-day, — men attracted by the profound problems concerning God, the soul, and the future life. They neither dismiss them with the frivolous, nor ignore them with those who are absorbed in worldly pursuits, neither minimize their importance like the materialist, nor cynically deny the possibility of knowledge concerning them, like the agnostic. On the contrary, they feel a strong desire to know what may be known about them. They even go so far as to look to Jesus Christ, with some degree of conviction, as the best if not the only source of light on these momentous themes. They may be ashamed of it, voicing their faint faith all stealthily, by night, as it were. Still they admit, "Christ and Christianity propound concerning these subjects the best wisdom as yet uttered in this world." Their timidity and prejudice are accompanied by earnestness and candor.

Our Lord declares, as preliminary to any true possession or even conception of heavenly things, the absolute necessity of a new birth. The Pharisee cannot endure that doctrine. Is he not a Jew, a ruler among the Jews, a scrupulous Pharisee, and himself a teacher of spiritual things? Must such as he receive new birth "from above" before they can even "see the kingdom of God"? Preposterous. Piqued, he purposely states the difficulty in such a way as to make it seem absurd. "Can a man enter the second time into his mother's womb and be born?" Nicodemus cannot have meant to take our Lord's language as referring to a new physical birth. His answer was intended to express his emphatic dissent from the principle involved, so far as he understood it. "As a new birth is impossible to a grown man, and an absurdity in



nature, so is this new moral and spiritual birth you speak of impossible to a man of settled character and convictions. The requirement of it as a condition of spiritual life is absurd." Something like this must Nicodemus have meant, for he was not a fool, and he was a Pharisee.

The doctrine of the new birth remains still an offence in Pharisaic eyes. It assumes that human nature is so radically evil that spiritual life can begin only with a new creation. The vital force necessary for this new start must come "from above," from a source superior to the soul. But the Pharisee finds in himself the spring and motive of spiritual life. To acquire correct character is his own high prerogative. Patronizingly he thanks God that he is not like other men. He believes himself to be spiritual by nature. What he needs, if he needs anything, is only light and development.

So speak the Nicodemuses of to-day. The pipe has indeed become an organ, and the "variations" multitudinously intricate; but the "air" is still the same. The prime thing in religion is to such people its prime difficulty. To insist on a radical change of heart by the Holy Spirit as the initial step in the true religious life abides a stumbling-block to not a few.

Nicodemus finds another difficulty in the inscrutable nature of the subject. "How can these things be?" he asks. After such clear and positive reiteration of the truth, he cannot in courtesy deny or ridicule it again; but he can veil his inward denial under a request for explanation. What and who is the Spirit, and how can he influence the heart and mind of man? I see in others and feel in myself only the impulses, desires, and aspirations which belong to human beings. What are the criteria of the Spirit's work? Suppose he does effect this change which you pronounce so necessary, what is man's responsibility in regard to it? How is

a person to continue himself, if the new Self comes "from above"? These voices, too, still echo about us from that historic colloquy by night. Still we hear the doubter's pet word, "how," "how," always "how"! And many souls — aye, earnest ones too, the more's the pity — stand persistently out in the dark with "how" in their mouths, "how" in their hearts, and "how" forever in their way to glory. "Ever learning and never able to come to the knowledge of the truth," they timidly wait on the threshold of the Palace Beautiful, repeating over and over their sad refrain, "How can these things be?" What are we to do with such? Shall we impatiently repel them? Shall we make them improper concessions because of their character and standing? Neither. The Great Teacher shall show us what to do. Let us turn to —

#### THE DIVINE ANSWER.

In his attitude to Nicodemus our blessed Lord is kind, but he does not compromise in the slightest degree. This prominent and estimable man, most desirable as a convert, is neither wheedled nor flattered. Divine truth makes no bargain with human respectability, however eminent. Christ clearly assumes authority to speak the decisive word on these high themes. The statement that "he taught as one having authority" is here abundantly confirmed. Nicodemus politely concedes him some authority, but Jesus tacitly assumed far more, distinctly asserting absolute and final knowledge. It is important to recognize this assumption of authority on the part of Christ, in order the better to comprehend what he says.

Observe with what emphasis, what abrupt and almost startling promptness, actually approaching rudeness, Jesus asserts his sovereign teachership. "You have come to ask me about religious truth, and I unhesitatingly tell you."

He does not wait, reflect, or qualify. He appeals to no philosopher, quotes no rabbi. He has not *concluded* by ratiocination that a man must be "born again," or "born from above." We may read the phrase either way, as the two meanings are but a shade apart. He speaks *ex cathedra*: "Verily, verily, I say unto thee, except a man be born of water and the Spirit, he cannot enter into the kingdom of God." There is here no reference — or only the remotest — to any ritual observance, but there is Christ's most authoritative affirmation that men need a new spiritual birth. Our Lord commits himself to this proposition beyond a doubt. Whoever denies it, whoever complains that he cannot understand it, Jesus certainly declares a spiritual new birth necessary to a real religious life. We can stand on his authority.

Nicodemus was a "teacher of Israel." The Lord's doctrine should not have seemed so monstrous in his eyes. Ought he not to have recognized its accord with man's state of sin and helplessness? Little could the Jewish ruler have reflected upon human sin and weakness, feebly must he have conceived God's exacting holiness, to deem Christ's assertion strange. Reason and experience alike teach that a second birth is as far beyond man's unaided power as the first. The law of Moses agreed with this. Had Nicodemus never studied out the meaning of atoning sacrifice? Had he not read in the psalm that prayer, "O God, create within me a clean heart"? Had he deemed idle that promise of prophecy that one day the Almighty would himself stamp the divine law on men's hearts?

People of to-day are still less justified than was Nicodemus in cavilling at this truth. With double reason may our Master now urge, "Marvel not that I say unto thee, Ye must be born again." It is among the clearest teachings of modern science that like produces like, that kind begets kind. Sow

wheat, and wheat will spring. By no incantation, manipulation, artifice, or patience can man get life from matter which does not already contain it. Life from life — only from life ; that is the law of the material world, at any rate. It should incline us to believe the same touching the spiritual ; for God created and rules both realms alike.

The Lord, however, does not deny that difficulties naturally connect themselves with the doctrine of regeneration. The source of them lies in our two natures, flesh and spirit, so immeasurably diverse, while so intimately locked together. Our present life is at best carnal. “That which is born of the flesh is flesh.” “This I say, brethren, that flesh and blood cannot inherit the kingdom of God.” Now “the natural man receiveth not the things of the Spirit of God, for they are foolishness unto him.” We must have spiritual enlightenment. To be sure, “that which is born of the Spirit is spirit,” and with spiritual birth comes a measure of spiritual comprehension ; but even this is not complete as yet, for “ourselves also which have the first-fruits of the Spirit, even we ourselves groan within ourselves, waiting for our adoption, to wit, the redemption of our body.”

But our failure to comprehend the facts does not alter them, while ordinary observation may assure us that they are as alleged. The wind blows. We hear it, but “we know neither its birthplace nor its grave.” Yet it blows, and is a ubiquitous, indubitable fact and force, sometimes as the cyclone’s blast, sometimes as the gentle zephyr’s breath. No form of force is itself visible ; each is known by its effects. Yet madness itself would not, viewing the flood’s desolation at Johnstown last year, doubt the existence of gravity.

How unreasonable, O ye doubters, are your scruples after all ! Why decline to accept spiritual truth because mysterious, when you daily assume to be true physical facts equally uncomprehended ? You cannot fully understand

anything. Ah, your trouble is not here, it is moral ; it lies in your lack of will, not in your lack of knowledge. "If I told you earthly things and ye believe not, how shall ye believe if I tell you heavenly things?" If you will not credit what stands visibly before your eyes, that sinful man needs more than self-reformation, how can you expect to understand the philosophy of true regeneration? If you will not learn the fundamental rules of arithmetic, how are you to master the calculus? Your perplexities, real enough, are largely of your own making. You hold your hand to your eye and complain that it is dark! Cease minimizing God; humble yourself and your petty philosophy: you shall have vision, — rich and saving, as wide and as far as you need.

For God's love is as great as his ways are wonderful. With that same authoritative tone unchanged, and even a higher claim asserted, with that mysterious doctrine of a new birth unrepealed, and presenting a simple illustration of man's free choice, the Heavenly Teacher comes to the grand culmination. He states the most glorious and important truth ever proposed to man's acceptance: "God so loved the world that he gave his only begotten Son, that whosoever believeth in him should not perish, but have everlasting life." O ruler among the people, timid yet proud; self-righteous Pharisee, dimly conscious of need; teacher of others, yet thyself wanting light; doubtful of divine truth, yet yearning to know it, — here it is, all in a sentence! Here resolve thy doubts, here rest thy soul, here wait till the day dawn and the shadows flee. God loves thee, though sinful; Christ came to seek thee, because thou wert lost. Believe on the Lord Jesus Christ, and thou shalt be saved.

## Lesson V. August 2.

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### CHRIST AT JACOB'S WELL.

*John iv: 5-26.*

BY REV. PROFESSOR R. S. COLWELL, GRANVILLE, OHIO.

NOT many months after John the Baptist had startled his followers by his prophetic exclamation, "Behold the Lamb of God, which taketh away the sin of the world," the multitudes began to throng about Jesus and to seek his baptism. Some of the Jews endeavored to make use of this increasing popularity of Jesus to stir the ambition and jealousy of the great forerunner. The attempt was a complete failure. John was content to do the great work assigned to him. His lofty spirit rose above the temptation, and he declared that his joy was fulfilled in decreasing as Christ increased. But John the Evangelist tells us that when Jesus knew of the attitude and action of the Pharisees toward himself he left Judæa for Galilee. The most direct route was through Samaria, and this our Saviour took. There is nothing in the record to mark for us the part of Judæa whence he started, nor yet the time; for the words, "Say not ye, There are yet four months, and then cometh harvest," furnish no definite information as to the time of year.

But we are told that our Lord arrived one day about the sixth hour—that is, about noon—at Jacob's well, near Sychar, and sat down by the well very weary with his journey, while his disciples went on into the city. The well is easy of identification at the present time; but as to the

site of the city, we cannot be so sure. Some have supposed that Sychar was identical with the ancient Shechem, nearly two miles away; while others think that it must have been a smaller city nearer to the well. But this, though possibly an interesting, certainly is not an important matter. Our interest centres about the well; for it was the scene of a memorable conversation,—a conversation helpful to the souls of men in all the ages since, and no less helpful now.

The first part of the narrative contains nothing particularly noteworthy. Jesus, weary from his journey, sits by the well. A Samaritan woman approaches, and he asks her for a drink of water. That request is significant only because made of a Samaritan by a Jew. The Samaritans were hated by the Jews for having mingled the race with the heathen nations, for establishing a place of worship on Mount Gerizim, and for hostile acts said to have been done by them at various times in the past. This hatred was so intense that contact with the Samaritans was supposed by a true Jew to be defiling, and intercourse between the peoples was reduced to a minimum. The woman is amazed that Jesus disregards this custom of his countrymen, and asks for an explanation. Jesus then seizes the opportunity furnished by her question to speak to her of the "living water" which he is able to bestow upon those who ask him. Evidently moved by some strange power, though doubting and perplexed, she asks that it be bestowed upon her. At this point, apparently because the woman's mind was now prepared for it, Jesus gives the conversation a sudden turn, and in a few words shows her that he is acquainted with her past history and her present life of shame. This at once convinces her that she is speaking with a prophet. The effect produced upon her by this knowledge is a most singular one. Her exclamation, "Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet," testifies to the correctness of this knowledge, but contains no flavor of confession. Her



mind seems to be completely occupied with another topic ; and without prelude or preparation she presents the subject which troubles her. " Our fathers worshipped in this mountain, and ye say that in Jerusalem is the place where men ought to worship." The very statement of the two positions held is in itself a request that he decide the point at issue. Many have thought that the woman asked the question in eager haste to turn the conversation from the unpleasant topic of her own personal sinfulness to a less embarrassing subject ; but although we may not assert that this cannot have been the case, there is nothing in the account to support the view, and very much against it. Every expression recorded by John tends to show that she was plain and straightforward in her speech, even to bluntness. Her first question is, " How is it that thou, being a Jew, askest drink of me, who am a woman of Samaria ? " Again she says, " Sir, thou hast nothing to draw with, and the well is deep." " Art thou greater than our father Jacob ? " " Give me this water, that I thirst not, neither come here to draw." " Sir, I perceive that thou art a prophet." In these words there is no trace of evasion. They are all pointed, pungent, keen. While it is not impossible, it certainly is improbable that one who used such direct speech should in the same breath acknowledge his prophetic power and attempt an evasion. The recognition of her own guilt doubtless was too seriously lacking in definiteness and force, but she does not act like one trying to cover it up or evade it. And also Christ's treatment of her question is significant. Never did he meet evasion and subterfuge with such condescension as is shown in his answer to her question ; he certainly treated the question as if it were an earnest and honest one, although we need not say a pertinent one. The fact seems to be that, whatever may have been her position at other times, she was now possessed of an eager desire to know what was the right

place in which to worship. It overtopped every other thought, and she put the question as it was in her mind, with the same straightforward earnestness that is shown in the others.

But that which ought most to absorb our attention and thought, that which we should be most eager to know and understand thoroughly, is our Lord's answer to the woman's question. Whatever the condition of the woman's heart, whence it sprang, he answered the question fully, and gave to this unknown, sinful woman a truth but little known at the time of this conversation by the well, and too little appreciated at the present day. The woman sought from One whom she regarded as a prophet an authoritative statement concerning the right place in which to worship God; and as a result the Son of God gave to her the simplest and clearest as well as the most comprehensive description the world has ever had of the worship due from the creature to the Creator. The only uncertainty in her mind was as to the place; but he who "giveth to all abundantly," did not stop with settling that, he corrected as well the assumption underlying it. Her question — yes, even the contest itself between the Jews and the Samaritans as to Mount Gerizim and Jerusalem — reflected the imperfect and incorrect idea of worship which dominated all the pagan religions and colored even the worship of Jehovah, — the idea of locality; the belief that there is some one spot or place more acceptable to God than all others; that acts of homage and worship performed there are more pleasing to him than such acts performed in other places can be. So thought the servants of Ben-hadad, king of Syria, when, defeated in battle in this same region by the princes of Israel, they said to their master, "Their gods are the gods of the hills, therefore are they stronger than we; but let us fight them in the plain, and surely we shall be stronger than they." Nor can we wonder at this mistake. It was a natural one. It has always been

the plan of the Divine Wisdom to reveal the truth gradually ; and there was much in the method and manner of the Old Testament revelation which might give occasion for this mistake, especially when we remember that men are ever prone to seize upon the symbol and hold it to the neglect of the truth symbolized. The presence of the pillar of cloud at the door of the tabernacle, and the cloud filling the Holy Place at the dedication of the temple, made so strong an impression upon the true Israelite that we may not wonder at him, and still less may we chide him, that his vision was not yet strong and clear enough to penetrate what the writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews calls "the shadow of good things to come," and discern the substance behind. If we are faithful in our search after truth, a large part of our progress must consist in learning, at least in thought, to discard the shell for the kernel, the symbol for the thing symbolized, the shadowy, shifting form for the substantial truth behind it. .

But note the answer of our Lord, which really consists of three parts. "Woman, believe me, the hour cometh, when ye shall neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem, worship the Father." It is significant that he speaks chiefly of what "cometh," not of the past. The practical and important question pertains to the present and the future. Whatever importance may have attached to any place in the past, as a centre of worship, is to give way. Even the temple at Jerusalem was no longer to be regarded, as it had been for centuries, pre-eminently the house of God. The reverent thoughts with which the Jews have viewed Jerusalem, and the Samaritans the mountain of Samaria, will be entirely out of place in the time that "cometh." In these words, then, the woman has her answer plainly given,—an answer which removes the cause of this whole dissension between the two peoples.

Observe now the second part of Christ's answer. "Ye worship ye know not what; we know what we worship, for salvation is of the Jews." This matter of worship even in the past has had more important elements in it than those pertaining to the locality where it should be offered. In these respects he states unequivocally that the Samaritans have been in the wrong, and the Jews in the right. The Samaritans, moreover, are worshipping in ignorance. They do not know what, or whom, they worship. The Jews do know. The Samaritans believed implicitly in Jehovah, but they stopped with the revelation of Moses. They had been standing still religiously and theologically for nearly fifteen centuries, while Jehovah had been leading his people onward, training them by revelation and by providence to broader and truer ideas of himself and his kingdom. By clinging to the Pentateuch and ignoring the rest of the Old Testament Scriptures, they had deprived themselves of the elevating, spiritualizing influence of the songs and prophecies, the visions and aspirations, of the men whom God had inspired to bless his people. The result was that they fell so far behind the Jews in spiritual things that our Saviour characterized their worship as ignorant worship, in comparison with the more intelligent service of the Jews. It is worthy of notice that here Jesus distinctly classes himself as a Jew, and avers that the Jews have accepted and adhered to the series of revelations through which God and his salvation had been made known.

Then, having declared that no particular locality is hereafter to be more acceptable than another, and that the Samaritans in their ignorance are worshipping an almost unknown god, the Lord gives utterance to a more lofty ideal of worship than the world had yet been prepared to receive. "The hour cometh, and now is, when the true worshippers shall worship the Father in spirit and truth: for

the Father seeketh such to worship him. God is spirit, and they that worship him must worship in spirit and truth." Here is the doctrine in which all the rest of the conversation centres, to which it all leads; and the vital point in this statement is to be found in the words "God is spirit." This truth had been intimated and assumed at various times in the Old Testament. Solomon in his prayer at the dedication of the temple had said, "Behold, the heaven and heaven of heavens cannot contain thee," and David had said, "Whither shall I go from thy spirit, or whither shall I flee from thy presence?" The very prohibition of the second commandment of the Decalogue assumed the spirituality of God. These are but a few of the many places where the truth is taught. But these words to the Samaritan woman put this implied teaching in a more distinct and emphatic form, and in a relation entirely new. The truth that God is spirit is asserted and emphasized in order to show what kind of worship should be offered to him. Right knowledge of God is essential to right worship of him. It is impossible that men should worship him acceptably without knowing and remembering what he is. Inasmuch as God is spirit, "he dwelleth not in temples made with hands, neither is worshipped with men's hands as though he needed anything." Out of the knowledge that God is spirit must come the knowledge that only spirit worship, spiritual worship, is acceptable to him. That is the great truth, the fundamental truth, the far-reaching truth, which the wearied Son of Man taught to this Samaritan woman by the well, — that the only true worship of Jehovah is spiritual worship, homage of the soul.

Let us notice in regard to such worship that it does not depend upon the place. The old strife about Gerizim and Mount Zion and all similar contests become in the light of Christ's words meaningless contentions. There is no holy city, there is no sacred temple, in which or toward which,

in particular, men ought to pray. Even the places which have been associated with the visible presence of the Son of God, and the sanctuaries where his Holy Spirit has been poured out upon the hearts of men contribute no essential element to make our worship acceptable to God. "Neither in this mountain, nor yet at Jerusalem," are words which put at rest forever all questionings as to the special sanctity of any particular place of worship.

But spiritual worship is also independent of time, as well as of place. Just as we are taught that there is no particular place where God is more pleased to receive the worship of his people than another, so there is no particular time when such worship is more acceptable. Paul wrote to the Colossians, "Let no man, therefore, judge you in meat or in drink, or in respect of an holy day, or of the new moon, or of the sabbath, which are a shadow of things to come; but the body is of Christ." The homage of the heart is as acceptable on a week-day as on the Lord's day, at the time of feasting as at the time of fasting.

But again, true spiritual worship is not conditioned on any particular form. At the time when this woman of Samaria sought to know from our Saviour the true place of worship, it would be almost impossible to think of that worship apart from the imposing ritual of the temple service. The priests and the vestments, the sacrifices and the incense, the shed blood and the consuming fire, would all be included. But this ritual, so distinctly appointed under the first covenant, was as distinctly abrogated under the new. It passed away as a part of the shadow, to be replaced by the substance in Christ; and the truth shines forth clear and bright that the repentant petition of the humble publican, or the unuttered prayer of the weeping Magdalene, is as acceptable worship in the sight of him who seeth the heart, as the more imposing adoration of Solomon in the temple, or of Hezekiah on the throne.



But although these external circumstances of place and time and manner are in no wise essential to true worship, let us not fall into the mistake of inferring that therefore they can have no legitimate effect upon true worship. We are creatures of circumstances, and should not forget that these have great power to influence us. They can be made exceedingly helpful in assisting and contributing to that which they are utterly powerless to produce, and he who ignores their power is guilty of folly. Just as the services of the tabernacle and the temple, the holy days and places of assembly, were useful in turning the attention, the affection, the aspiration of the worshipper toward Jehovah, so times and places and forms may now be helpful in preparing the soul for the worship which is beyond them. But none of these things are of divine appointment, and all may legitimately vary, according to personal preference and peculiarities. The essential, indispensable requisites of true worship are inward, not outward, spiritual, not material, and are attainable by all.

How far the Samaritan woman understood this great truth we can only conjecture. From her answer "I know that Messiah cometh; when he is come he will tell us all things," we may infer that the truth was too large for her immediate comprehension, and that in her perplexity she referred to the coming Messiah the decision of a matter far too large for her to grasp. And that there was nothing blameworthy in her spirit in regard to it is evident from the fact that Jesus at once declared himself to her as that Messiah more plainly than we know of his having done before even to his own disciples. "I that speak unto thee am he."

"It is strange," says Fairbairn, "that Christ should often speak his most remarkable words to the least remarkable persons. Here is a woman who for one splendid moment



emerges from the unknown, stands as in a blaze of living light, and vanishes into the unknown again. But while she stands she is immortalized; the moment becomes an eternal now, in which Christ and she face each other forever, he giving and she receiving truths the world can never allow to die. She represents heathenism, — the world waiting for the truth Christ was bringing. And what he gives to her he gives to the race; what she receives she receives for mankind."

## Lesson VI. August 9.

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### CHRIST'S AUTHORITY.

*John v: 17-30.*

BY REV. JOHN HUMPSTONE, D. D., BROOKLYN, N. Y.

A LARGE part of the gospel of John is taken up with the record of our Lord's great controversy with the religious leaders of the Jews. The very structure of the gospel seems to have been determined by the outlines of this conflict. Four notable miracles furnished the occasions out of which it grew,—three of them wrought at Jerusalem, one in Galilee. They were the cure of the impotent man at the pool of Bethesda, the multiplication of the loaves, the bestowal of sight upon the man born blind, and the raising of Lazarus. It was chiefly these works of power, and Christ's defence of them and of himself as their Author, which deepened the perplexity of the Sanhedrim into enmity, and led them to procure the death of Jesus.

We are about to consider that discourse of Jesus which grew out of the first of these miracles, or, more particularly, that part of it in which he declares the Son's equality with the Father and identifies himself with "the Son." Clearly it will help us to have started from this historical, factual point of view. The words we ponder are not the record of a course of abstract reasoning, they do not convey the speculations of a philosopher; they are the testimony of Jesus to himself when his authority and his work were challenged. We deal with no fine-spun theorizing of a merely human

mind, about the Trinity. There is given to us, rather, a revelation of the consciousness of one of the "Persons" within the Trinity, incarnate as the Christ. Some of his words are undoubtedly more attractive to most of us than these words are; for instance, his tender "Come unto me," his reassuring "Let not your heart be troubled," his practical "Whatsoever ye would that men should do unto you, do ye even so to them." But if any words of his have such value as we assign to them, all his words are of moment. What he has been pleased to say of any mystery, and especially of himself, we should be glad to study. We have no right to refuse to skirt those shores of this unfathomable sea of the being and nature of God, which our Lord has defined and charted for us. Beware of putting out upon such a sea in any cock-boat of speculation steered by yourself; but you may sail without danger in the ship which the Pilot commands.

## I.

Observe, then, that our Lord asserted his equality with God as his Father. It was in act, indeed, that the declaration was first implied rather than made. His was no ostentatious proclamation of himself. Jesus made known his divine dignity in the exercise of compassion and by the putting forth of power. The helplessness of the man beside the pool stirred his pity and elicited his aid. Even when the assertion of his equality with his Father was made in words, it was still made indirectly, at first. The miracle had been wrought upon the Sabbath. It was for this that the Jews persecuted Jesus. He justified himself by an appeal to the continuous activity of God. As yet there was no such direct, insistent, comprehensive claim of equality as followed later. There is nothing about the self-assertion of Jesus, wherever found, that is inconsistent with the prophet's forecast, "He shall not cry, nor lift up, nor cause his voice to be

heard in the street;" nothing that nullifies his own word, "I am meek and lowly of heart." There is a natural, unobtrusive quality about our Lord's works and words, the modesty of truth, which, with his poise and power, authorizes his claims about himself.

None the less, though indirectly in both act and word, the assertion was made. When Jesus Christ justified himself for healing on the Sabbath by saying, "My Father worketh until now, and I work," he did what no mere man could rightfully have done. He cited the continuous activity of God, in providence and redemption, filling all time, the Sabbath as well as other days, from the creation onward, as the justification, because it was the parallel, of his own activity on the Sabbath. Contravening as it did the Jewish law, his conduct was indefensible in a Jew, except as he put himself above the law. This, without hesitation and unequivocally, he did. He represented the miracle as his own act, — "I work." He claimed for it, as done by himself on the Sabbath, a parity with the self-directed, sabbatic energy of God. He put himself in a relation of peculiar sonship with God. The Jews understood him so to do. As they construed his words, he added to the sin of breaking the Sabbath the more dreadful sin of "blasphemy," — "he called God his own father, making himself equal with God." Were they wrong? If they were, it was an opportunity for the Christ. He might have defended himself against the charge of Sabbath-violation by parrying this later attack. He had but to show how mistaken was their construction of his words to allay their enmity. He had only to claim that he was "the unresisting organ of a higher Being" to put the matter upon an entirely different footing. But he did not do so. If he had been the peculiar and merely human "instrument" that some have represented him, then this was his great opportunity to set the matter in that light forever. But he

did nothing of the kind. He did not disclaim in any wise that meaning of his words which his enemies put upon them. He had done, intentionally if indirectly, just what they accused him of doing,—he had made “himself equal with God.”

## II.

When the Lord saw how far his adversaries were from acceding to this claim, and noted that their enmity toward him had only been intensified by its assertion, he defined, positively and in detail, the equality which he had indirectly asserted. He was no craven, disposed to cringe before the consequences of the truth. On such a subject as the one disputed, there must be neither equivocation on his part, nor ground for uncertainty on theirs.

He begins with his formula of assurance, “Verily, verily, I say unto you.” How must the words have sounded upon his lips! Three times their solemn chime of asseveration gives emphasis to his discourse. The truth they substantiate is weighty, worthy of special attention, matter of reality,—the expression of his own conscious life as the Son of God.

The words that follow seem to deal with the matter in its essential aspect as a relation between the Son and the Father; in its practical aspect as requiring the reverence and faith of men to be given to the Son equally with the Father; in its historical aspect as already manifested to men in the ministry of the Son of Man, bestowing spiritual life, effecting spiritual discrimination between men; and as yet to be manifested “in the resurrection,” when the Son of Man shall be recognized as the conqueror of physical death and the final Judge. The first and last of these phases of the matter concern exactly the same facts, defining the relation and establishing the equality of the Son and the Father. They may therefore be regarded together, leaving the prac-

tical phase of the question for a final word. Our Lord's purpose in separating them seems to have been the better identification of himself, present before his hearers, with the personality to whom he refers as "the Son." There is a most significant interchange of phrases as the discourse unfolds. Now it is "the Son" of whom Jesus speaks; in the next breath the pronouns "I" and "my" and "me," and in a moment his description of "the Son" as "Son of Man," left no opportunity for mistake. What he claimed for "the Son" he claimed for himself.

What, then, is the nature and the scope of the equality which our Lord asserted to exist between himself and the Father? Looking only to his words here used for answer, it seems clear, first, that it is an equality existing between distinct "personalities." One knows well how little adequate the word "person" is, in any of its meanings, to express just what is meant when this distinction between the Father and the Son is affirmed; how likely it is to represent as wholly discrete those of whom it is intended to say no more than that there is a distinction between them. But no other word is available. And in this discourse our Lord so speaks as to compel the conception of such a distinction as the word implies, existing between the Son and the Father. There must be that which approximates our idea of a personal distinction when one sees the voluntary activity of another only to make it the model for his own, freely determined. Jesus said, "Whatsoever things he [the Father] doeth, these the Son also doeth in like manner." Love, as we know it, is exercised only between persons. Jesus said, "The Father loveth the Son." Where a trust is bestowed and received, there must be duality, whatever underlying unity there may be. Jesus asserts that "the Father hath given all judgment unto the Son." On another occasion our Lord did not hesitate to say, with equal emphasis, "I and the Father are one."

But this very sentence, insisting as it does upon a unity, affirms in the same breath, but not necessarily in the same sense, a duality between the Father and himself. This, with the relation of the Spirit to the Father and the Son, is the mystery of the Trinity. It is not a problem for the reason, it is a subject for faith. We rest only and wholly on the word of him who knew.

It seems evident, secondly, that the equality asserted is inherent and essential. It is not procured or arranged; it has not been seized upon. As Paul, in his own way, puts it for the Philippians, our Lord, "being originally in the form of God," did not need to count it "a thing to be grasped, to be on an equality with God." The equality is one of nature. This is expressed by Jesus, in the passage before us, in the use of the terms "Father" and "Son," and by his representation of each as acting freely, and yet in mutual, inevitable accord.

In the third place, accordingly, the equality between the Father and the Son finds expression in the characteristic acts of each. On the Son's part there is that subordination which becomes a son, — that inability, from choice, not from impotence, to do anything of himself; that readiness to receive in trust from the Father responsibilities to whose assumption or discharge only the Father's Son is equal. On the Father's part there is love toward the Son, and such confidence of love as leads him to show the Son "all things that himself doeth." They have no secrets from each other. The action of one is sure to involve the voluntary action of the other. They are thus blessed reciprocally, and only so. Is it not just here that we may dimly discern how that Being who is the eternal "God over all," and before all, is "blessed for evermore"? When, as yet, he was the only One, before "the morning stars sang together, or the sons of God shouted for joy," he was no less blessed than now, when all his works



do praise him. He has never been dependent; he has never known solitude. In the reciprocal blessedness of Father, Son, and Spirit, his life has ever been love.

Finally, the equality asserted has its exemplification in the nature of the work intrusted by the Father to the Son. To him it is given "to have life in himself" and to impart spiritual life to men. Every soul "dead in trespasses and sins" quickened into "newness of life," is a witness to the co-equal authority and power of the Son. The transfer to the Son of the right to judge man, historically realized in that process of spiritual discrimination between men which is perpetually going forward wherever the character of the Son of Man is manifested and his word declared, is a testimony to the same effect. The hour yet to come, when "they that are in the tombs shall hear his voice and shall come forth," to enter upon a destiny determined by the standards of his truth and their relation to him, will end all cavil as to the Son's equality with the Father. In that hour "every knee shall bow, and every tongue confess that Jesus Christ is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

### III.

Truth is for life. Every doctrine involves a duty. Our Lord did not hesitate to press his claims upon men so far as to indicate such action on their part as was requisite and becoming. What he had asserted and defined as to his equality with the Father, he applied in two directions.

Since the Son is equal with the Father, he is to be had in equal honor. Let no man think that he can please the Father when he discredits or dishonors the Son, "only-begotten," "well-beloved." The matter is put by Christ in the strongest possible way. It is twice so put. He who would realize the Father's purpose must honor the Father's Son "even as" he honors the Father, in the same way, to the

same degree. He who refuses to render homage to the Son thereby dishonors the Father who sent him. These are weighty words. They require such reverence and obedience for Jesus Christ as men admit, instinctively, to belong to God. But these words are as clear as they are strong. There is no possibility of mistake as to their meaning. They are words which will yet judge some who have framed and defended and propagated intellectual conceptions of the Christ which are inconsistent with such declarations made by himself. They are words which impugn the worth of that theism which refuses to be Christian. Above all, they are words which shame the men who bear Christ's name and theoretically admit his claims, but whose disobedience to his precepts is practically the worst irreverence. Let such hear him saying to them, "Why call ye me Lord, Lord, and do not the things which I say?"

The first-fruit of the disposition to honor the Son is that exercise of faith which receives him as the one sent by the Father to be the Saviour of the world. Such a faith finds in his word a gospel, in his mission salvation, in fellowship with him eternal life. Such a faith rests equally upon the Father's love and the Son's, finding in the ministry of the Son the certification of the Father's reality, the revelation of the Father's purpose, and the only adequate measure of his love. Such a faith is its own evidence. Christ's word for it, he who cherishes such a faith has already passed out of the sphere of death into the sphere of the eternal life. "This is life eternal, to know the only true God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent." For such a believer death will have no sting; over him the grave will get no victory; to him the judgment to come will bring no alarms. "There is now no condemnation to them that are in Christ Jesus."

How better, then, can we conclude our meditation than by the confession of our faith in the Son of God? What words

more fitting to express that faith than those words long since wrought out at Nicæa, to become the perpetual protest of the Church against the Arianism of every age? We believe "in one Lord Jesus Christ, the only begotten Son of God, begotten of his Father before all worlds, God of God, Light of Light, very God of very God, begotten, not made, being of one substance with the Father; by whom all things were made: who for us men, and for our salvation came down from heaven, and was incarnate by the Holy Ghost of the Virgin Mary, and was made man, and was crucified also for us under Pontius Pilate. He suffered and was buried; and the third day he rose again according to the Scriptures, and ascended into heaven, and sitteth on the right hand of the Father. And he shall come again with glory to judge both the quick and the dead: whose kingdom shall have no end."

## Lesson VII. August 16.

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### THE FIVE THOUSAND FED.

*John vi: 1-14.*

By REV. PROFESSOR JOHN M. ENGLISH, NEWTON CENTRE, MASS.

THE feeding of the five thousand was one of our Lord's most remarkable miracles. All four of the evangelists record it. That John does so is doubly significant of its importance; for he mentions but four or five events in the entire Galilean ministry of Jesus, that extended from about January 1, A. D. 28, to the autumn of A. D. 29, — the period that mainly occupies the first three Gospels. John gives an account of this miracle because it peculiarly manifested the glory of Jesus, and because it furnished the text of Christ's great sermon preached the next day in the synagogue of Capernaum, which is preserved in the sixth chapter of this gospel.

#### THE SETTING OF THE MIRACLE.

According to the Synoptic Gospels, Jesus was now in or near the city of Capernaum, — the centre of his labors in Galilee. The miracle of feeding the five thousand took place on the eastern side of the lake, near the city of Bethsaida-Julias.

Jesus had at least two reasons for retiring into that locality. One was that he had just heard of the death of John the Baptist at the hands of Herod Antipas, Tetrarch of Galilee. This base act must have made Jesus unusually

thoughtful about his own end. At any rate, it must have filled him with sadness; for he loved John both for his ministry and for his noble character. He wished to retire into solitude for meditation. The other was that the twelve apostles had returned from their mission of teaching and healing to report their work to their Master. They were weary. "And he saith unto them, Come ye yourselves apart into a desert place, and rest awhile. For there were many coming and going, and they had no leisure so much as to eat."

Jesus took his twelve disciples with him into the boat, and they slowly passed along the northern shore of the lake to the other side. The crowd, finding out that he had gone, poured around the head of the lake on foot. Their numbers were swelled from the various cities which they passed, for all had heard of Christ's mighty works. These were joined by companies of pilgrims from farther north, on their way to attend the approaching passover at Jerusalem, desirous of seeing and hearing the Wonder-worker, whose fame was ringing throughout the land. So eager were the throng that they went on foot faster than the little boat went by water, and some of them at least were on the shore waiting for Jesus to disembark. He made his way with his disciples into the mountain, and there he sat down with them. But their semi-privacy was soon invaded by the curious multitude that kept pouring in, and the search for quiet and rest was thwarted.

We cannot believe that Jesus was sorry at the interruption. He doubtless felt as he did on saying to his disciples, when they, returning with food, found him talking with the woman at Jacob's Well: "My meat is to do the will of him that sent me, and to accomplish his work." Luke says, "He welcomed them." Both Matthew and Mark report that as he saw the great multitude, he had compassion on them, —

Mark adding, in his characteristically graphic way, "because they were as sheep not having a shepherd." "The shepherd impulse," remarks Dr. Clarke, "was strong in his heart, and the sight of sheep unshepherded always drew it forth." It was never a hardship for the Master, no matter how weary he was or what plans he had in mind, to forget himself and help the needy. Is it for us? That day which he had set apart as a day of quiet and seclusion from the press of the customary crowd, proved to be one of the busiest and most blessed of his life. From early morning its hours were spent in healing the sick and in abundant teaching. Luke tells us what the burden of his preaching was. He "spoke to them of the kingdom of God," — the theme that was ever uppermost in his mind and heart.

#### THE PROVING OF PHILIP.

"The day is now far spent." The *first* evening, as it was called, extending from three until six, is at hand. The multitude must have food. Jesus said to Philip, "Whence are we to buy bread, that these may eat?" Now, Jesus could not have asked that for mere information, for Philip had none to give, as the Lord knew; and John adds, "for he himself knew what he was about to do." Nor could he have intended simply to puzzle Philip. That would have been unworthy of Jesus. "This he said to prove him." The question must have been intended, ultimately at least, to test Philip's deeper self, to call out "the true answer of faith."

That is always the Lord's interior purpose in teaching men. He has no need of our little arithmetical calculations as to supply and demand, but he has need of us for the refining of our characters. With his keener insight he reads the possibilities that are enfolded within us, and he tries to draw them out. Even when he is conferring with us for

the weal of others, as he did with Philip and Andrew, he never loses sight of the good that may thus accrue to our personal characters. Thus he keeps testing us at the springs of action. He cares more about us than about the things we handle. He would rather have us get up than get on. Pascal said that, though the universe might crush him, yet in the very act of being crushed he should be greater than the universe, since he should *know* what the universe never could, that *he was being crushed*. "Thou hast made man a little lower than God." It is with man — knowing, thinking, feeling, willing man — that the Lord Christ is fundamentally concerned. How to build men up into the strength and symmetry of his own character, that is the Lord's problem in dealing with individuals and with society. In his testing of us do we respond with a requiting faith? Do we give back the clear ring of genuine character? If we do not, Christ's supreme concern for us and his ways with us radically fail.

#### THE MIRACLE.

"Jesus said, Make the people sit down." In that brief command how the Master towered above his two disciples! They in their puny wisdom stood baffled before the problem of feeding the multitudes there in the desert of Bethsaida-Julias; he, with the calm and the majesty of conscious divine power gave the order to the disciples to arrange the thousands for the great meal. "So the men sat down, in number about five thousand."

Mark graphically describes the beautiful scene. The five thousand men reclined, in Oriental fashion, on the green-sward, by companies of a hundred and of fifty. Those companies, clad in their many-colored garments, resembled so many variegated flower-beds set in the rich green grass, with which they made a striking contrast. Five thousand men,



reclining in this orderly arrangement along the green slope of the mountain, must have spread over an extensive space, probably several acres. Yonder at one end of the area, with eyes uplifted toward heaven, stands the Wonder-worker, who is about to feed this vast crowd with the five loaves and the two fishes now held in his hands. Nor was this arrangement merely beautiful, it was also useful. It rendered the miracle manifest, since all could see that their supply came from Jesus, and that he had only the five loaves and two fishes.

Jesus first gave thanks,—our “grace before meat;” and then the loaves and the fishes began to multiply, and the amazing wonder did not cease until the vast multitude of five thousand men, besides women and children, “were filled.” So is it ever, when we take our little gifts, of whatever sort, to Christ, the Giver, and seek his blessing upon them, they increase and become sufficient. “Become sufficient!” But let us be sure we understand what that means; for the bread with which the Lord Jesus thus fed the hungry multitudes was the common barley loaves, thin, brittle cakes, the coarse but wholesome food of the common people. He is glad to satisfy our physical hunger, but he does not provide us with superfluous and dainty luxuries that pamper rather than nourish the human body. His prayer reads: “Give us this day our daily *bread*.” He here answered his own model petition.

While the process of the mighty sign utterly baffles our intellectual grasp, and we must leave it as an inscrutable mystery, yet the glory of the character of the Son of God that shines out — oh, how resplendently! — in the putting forth of his miraculous energy, we can appreciate and turn to profit. For that creative energy was not sheer, hard omnipotence; it had back of it a heart of divine love, and a blessed purpose shot through it. Jesus never wrought a miracle to

minister to his own physical comfort, never for the mere gratification of the display of divine power, never for the promotion of his personal ambition. Each of his miracles, even the most astounding of them, was for the welfare of men. Here, as in all things else, he could have said, "The Son of man came not to be ministered unto, but to minister." He came to bless and to redeem every part of our complex nature. Compassion for men in their physical distress and sicknesses, in the hardship and sorrow of their temporal lot, in their spiritual ruin and danger of doom, prompted him to the humiliation of the incarnation, to the toil and mental anguish of his ministry, and to his death of sacrificial woe. He wrought this miracle, then, just out of his compassion for the physical hunger of the multitude. He was the prince of philanthropists. In this he set an example for his disciples, in all time, that is of the nature of a binding law. How slow have they been to learn and to obey it! One of the encouraging signs of our time is the widening ministry of the Church to the physical and temporal weal of suffering mankind. We are beginning to see that men who are in the thick of the struggle for securing bread for themselves and for their families must first of all be touched and reached where they are; their pressing bodily demands must be met before they are prepared to taste the proffered bread of eternal life. Is there not here a principle of great value in coping with some phases of the industrial problems that are upon us? May the Church of Jesus Christ be wise in seeking and in administering the will of its Head in this matter, which is so vital to the spread of his kingdom in the near future!

But Christ's compassion in feeding the five thousand had a yet deeper reach. The miracle was a sign. It was a parable in act. It was an object-lesson of the spiritual discourse that fell from his lips the next day in the synagogue at

Capernaum, on himself as the food of man's immortal self. And Jesus distinctly intended that it should be. John, the disciple of rarest spiritual insight into the person and work of our Lord, clearly saw its significance; and so he, who is very sparing in his record of miracles, reports this one in the service of that profound address, the cursory reading of which shows how clearly Jesus, in his ways with men, ever kept in view his ultimate aim. He was and is eager, even to the point of consuming zeal, to give them the blessing of eternal life. When he performed the miracle, it was in the hope that those who were to hear the discourse the next day might receive him as the bread of life. When, instead, many even of his disciples said, "This is a hard saying; who can hear it?" and rejected him, he was stung to the quick, and with a heavy heart he turned, in the midst of the general desertion, to the twelve, and asked, "Would ye also go away?" When Simon Peter, as the spokesman of the little loyal company, answered him, "Lord, to whom shall we go? thou hast the words of eternal life; and we have believed and known that thou art the Holy One of God," it must have been as soothing balm applied to the aching wound. A small remnant, at least, of his followers were beginning to appreciate him for what he was, and his cardinal mission to the world.

#### THE GATHERING OF THE FRAGMENTS.

So soon as there was no further call for the supernatural, Jesus ceased using it. He provided the meal, which the disciples could not do; he now left to them the gathering up of what remained, which they could do. There is a function for Christ's disciples even in connection with his most divine works. That function he expects them, not himself, to perform. At the close, then, as at the beginning, of this miracle, how conspicuous the law of the divine

economy in our Lord's operations! It shone out both in the fact and in the method of saving the fragments. Jesus Christ is profuse in his gifts, but never wasteful. It would have been as wrong for his disciples not to save, for future use, what was left over, as it would have been for him to refuse to furnish the meal.

#### THE EFFECT OF THE MIRACLE.

"When therefore the people saw the sign which he did, they said, This is of a truth the prophet that cometh into the world."

"The sign" — John's invariable term for designating Christ's miracles — signified to the people that the doer of it must be "the prophet," by whom they meant, not some exceptionally honored human agent of Almighty God, but the Messiah himself foretold by Moses. Their notion of what the Messiah was, is given in the next verse. "They were about to come and take him by force, to make him king." He was, in their eyes, a mighty political and military leader. The wonderful display of power in the multiplication of the loaves and fishes, inflamed the mercurial natures of those Galilean peasants to the highest pitch of excitement. In a moment they turned fanatics. They were ready to seize him and, even against his will, to take him to Jerusalem, the beloved capital of their nation, and there, in the very presence of the hated Romans, crown him king, at the most sacred of their festivals, the passover, to which some of them were journeying. Thus was the Satanic temptation of the wilderness repeated. How did Jesus meet it? "Jesus therefore perceiving that they were about to come and take him by force, to make him king, withdrew again into the mountain himself alone."

That temptation, so fascinating to many men in every age, and so frequently yielded to, found in the Son of Man not even a faintest whisper of response. It was met as the

resisting shield meets the swift-flying spear that falls blunted and harmless to the ground. These Galileans were entirely mistaken in him. While to them the splendid sign signified that he was a mere political Messiah, to him it signified — and he meant that it should to them — that he was the Bread of eternal life. They had totally and irretrievably missed its meaning. “It seemed,” says Stalker, “the crowning hour of success. But to Jesus himself it was an hour of sad and bitter shame. This was all his year’s work had come to! This was the conception they yet had of him! He accepted it as the decisive indication of the effect of his work in Galilee. He saw how shallow were its results.”<sup>1</sup> He could have been the popular hero of the hour. “It was himself who struck the fatal blow at his popularity.” “He himself sendeth the multitude away.” What a scene that was! “It is almost a wonder that it has not attracted the imagination of some great painter, — Jesus scattering the multitude who are tempting him to accept a crown of worldly sovereignty.”

I wonder if, while we inwardly blame those Galileans for their carnal view of Jesus Christ, we are in reality guilty of the same sin? Does our interest in him culminate in his being our “Bread-king”? Are we enthusiastic over him only so long as we hope to enlist his power in promoting our worldly aims? And are we through with him when he insists upon our doing as he says, instead of himself doing as we say? The question of Jesus to the Pharisees, “What think ye of the Christ?” is as pertinent now as it was then. For are we not all in danger of taking him for less than he is, and so of missing the best he has to give? And in missing that, do we not miss all? John tells us that, when Jesus was in Jerusalem at the first passover of his ministry, “many

<sup>1</sup> *Life of Jesus Christ*, by James Stalker, p. 95. A very suggestive and stimulating book; every Sunday-School teacher should have it.

believed on him, beholding the signs which he did." But he did not trust himself unto them." Their faith was a "milk faith," as Luther says, and Jesus would have nothing to do with such a faith as that. He was not willing to be believed on as a mere wonder-worker. Is the Master compelled to class us with those old-time make-believe believers? What do we think of him as personal Lord and Saviour? That is the testing question. When he declares to us, "I am that Bread of life," do we pray with deep spiritual desire, "Lord, evermore give us this bread"? or do we let him go his way, our inner selves still hungry and starving, and we knowing it not?

## Lesson VIII. August 23.

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### CHRIST THE BREAD OF LIFE.

*John vi: 26-40.*

BY REV. FRANCIS BELLAMY, BOSTON, MASS.

THIS crowd, hot from the oars, racing after bread, must have brought to the mind of Jesus his own struggle over bread not long before. In that test, when his Tempter wove out of the importunate demands of hunger the argument that bread was of more consequence than duty, his whole work hung on the decision. The proper balance between the body's comfort and the soul's true life was at stake. To have yielded then was to lower his standard, to stultify his consecration. His answer was, "I can be hungry, but I cannot do this unworthy thing." He examined and closed the bread-question for himself and for all of us. Man shall not live by bread alone; truth and duty are more than even food. How pitiful this crowd's avidity for the lesser good must have seemed to the man who would starve rather than debase his ideal! His first words rebuke their mean errand, and summon them to work henceforth for the supreme interest, the wealth incorruptible.

Duty to work for the eternal life is thus the first thought in our lesson. Ye seek me, says Jesus, rebukingly, not out of interest in me or in the import of the signs which I have wrought, but because ye would be well fed. Strain not so for the food of the passing day, mere meat for per-



ishing bodies. Work for the food of eternal life. That is the prize which the Father has ordained the Son of man to give you.

Here, as in the Sermon on the Mount and in his conversation with Martha, Jesus utters his dissuasive from misplaced eagerness. Our corroding cares and anxieties, the overload from our absorption in business, the waste from misdirected energy, — oh, the pity of it in the eyes of Him who alone saw true!

“For a cap and bells our lives we pay,  
Bubbles we buy with the whole soul’s tasking;  
’T is heaven alone that is given away,  
’T is only God may be had for the asking.”

But how this “Work not for the meat that perisheth” strikes across the habits built up in us by birth and breeding! How it contradicts common-sense! How many maxims which we are used to consider especially virtuous, it stamps as worldly! What does the Lord mean? Is the carefulness which makes our homes spots of comfort, the hourly thrift which strives to overcome the forms of household waste, the foresight and combination which underlie business enterprise and civilization, all wrong? Were the old hermits right? Were the barefoot, begging friars more in harmony with Jesus than the industrious, Christian home-makers of to-day? So it might perhaps seem, were we to leave Christ’s sentence half said. Read on: “Work not . . . but work for that meat that endureth to everlasting life.” It is a transfer of emphasis, made bold that it may be unmistakable. Men admit as important both these aims, but exert themselves to attain the former, while slighting the latter. Jesus would restore the true balance. There is no danger that earthly interests will suffer. So, with true Oriental accent, Christ dissuades therefrom by an apparent prohibition, and points to the loftier alternative as

if it were the round horizon of duty. He who was subject to his parents in Joseph's home and trade preached no gospel of idleness. The Working-man of Nazareth never belittles frugality or toil. He rather makes the necessity for them the basis whence to emphasize a higher necessity. If earthly toil is needful, spiritual toil is so infinitely more. Spend not yourselves in supplying transient needs, but strive after the eternal gold.

Such is the exalted course which Christ urges upon these common people. He is not afraid of shooting over their heads. They need to understand just this lesson which he propounds. They are hungry, yet he gives them, not as yesterday, the dinner they seek; he insists that they shall even now see the higher aim, and live in it. But he phrases this with a vivid concreteness which will make them think; what he speaks of is the meat that abideth unto eternal life. Into our age likewise Jesus comes inculcating no mere theoretical life. To us as to the men of his time he offers the concrete and the practical. He points every call to a nobler life by saying, "I have overcome the world." In this same world which so tries us, he lived, and without sin.

The natural question of Christ's auditors was: "What must we do that we may work the works of God?" They meant external requirements, ceremonies relating to God. But they stumbled into a happy wording of the true idea, — works of God, service wherein God worketh in us. Jesus makes this undesigned phrase his text. "This is the work of God," — springing from God as the result of his indwelling, — "that ye believe on him whom he hath sent."

Oh, brothers, would that we might forget this phrase as a formula, and go back to the true gospel of it! It has been impoverished. To some, "I believe" is mere piece of a creed; with others it covers only the initiatory act of the

Christian life. Christ means by belief infinitely more than either or both of these, — he means a primary effort and a continued state of the will. The primary effort is the acceptance of what God offers in Christ. It involves on the part of the believer peace, entrance into Christ's way of thinking, and surrender in all things to his leadership. The genuine experience can omit no one of these. The continued state of mind is, moreover, as necessary to Christ's idea of faith as the initial act; he sets forth as the duty and privilege of all men a life completely possessed by an overmastering conviction of duty springing from love to God.

Here is seen the essential unity of faith and works. A belief truly attaching to the personality of Jesus Christ inevitably issues in Christlikeness. Faith is the progenitor of good works; but it is also itself a work, continuous, permeating, fundamental, which gives cohesion and proportion to all the others. Proportion is often the main thing. How seldom does the good trait for which we may be justly famed express a general symmetry of character! Our impulses to acts of goodness run in freaks. Heredity, circumstances, training, are the forces which have built the curious formation of good and bad, lying side by side, which we recognize as our native selves. But when a man intelligently believes in the Son of God, a mightier force begins to work in him, promoting unity and balance among his virtues. Erratic impulses disappear; moral sanity displaces whims. The clearer the belief, the more rounded the character. Faith in Jesus is in any man the indispensable keynote to any perfect symphony of good works.

To those listeners who cavil at believing him at all, the import of "belief on" Jesus is of course lost. They demand proof. They ask him what he can "do" and "work," as a sign that he has a divine right to tell them to do and work. He had fed them, — yes, once; but Moses fed daily, for forty

years, a whole nation with bread from heaven. Jesus turns the point of their clumsy challenge by a double contrast between God's ancient work through Moses and God's present offer to them. "Truly Moses gave you not the bread from heaven; but my Father gives you the bread from heaven, the real bread. For the bread of God is that coming down from heaven and giving life to the world."

As will be seen, Jesus does not yet identify himself with the bread, as the old version implies. He says in effect: Moses was only an agent; but now my Father gives without agent, intermediary, or priest, directly to the individual. None are so low or so distant from him as to be beyond God's immediate touch. Furthermore, the bread which Moses gave was only apparently from heaven. It had no divine properties; it spoiled like other bread, it conveyed no more life than other bread. But my Father now gives you bread truly from heaven, endowed with divine properties, able to communicate God's life to all mankind. The hearers catch at least a part of his meaning. They had demanded an authentication ranking with the manna-sign. They hear him declare explicitly that he has something infinitely better. Naturally, perhaps sceptically, they therefore say, "Lord, evermore give us this bread."

Christ's testy auditors do not in fact desire the true bread; yet as they have asked him for it, he says plainly, "I am the Bread of life." How many of our Lord's profoundest announcements were made to unpromising listeners! This sensual, impatient company were the first to hear the thrilling declaration of the mystic truth which the Lord's Supper keeps before the world. Jesus had approached it gradually. In describing the true bread he had set forth his own attributes, thus creating expectancy and desire. They ask him for this bread for evermore, and he replies with quiet majesty, "I am that for which you ask."

Will they try to understand this mystery? Even to the believer it is ineffable. But these unbelievers do not try to grasp it. They say stupidly, Will he give us his flesh to eat? Christ therefore at once repeats and explains, "He that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst." It was as if he had said, Stagger not at what I say. Believe it. You are weak; you cannot master yourselves; you want strength of will. Come to me in open and irreversible self-surrender, and you shall never feel weak again. You are vexed, agitated, distressed; repose on me with a lasting faith, and you shall be lifted above circumstances, you shall have peace of mind.

After that promise, experience has always written, "Tried and proved." Yet our own slowness to trust it, notwithstanding all experience, makes its summary rejection by the mob, who came to Christ for material, not for spiritual food, seem very natural. Jesus was not surprised; yet the light must be flashed upon them, if only to manifest that they loved darkness rather than light. "Ye have indeed seen me, and believe not," he said to them, reproachfully. They had asked for a sign in order that they might believe him. Of a spiritual truth no sign can be offered but the truth itself. To those waiting to be convinced, like John the Baptist or Christ's intimate disciples, miracles might corroborate the Lord's spiritual claim. The unsympathetic would discredit the miracle itself. To such a generation no useful sign could be given. Even the unpronounceable wonder of life from the dead, — of an unconquerable life, proving that Christ was indeed the Bread of Life, — even the resurrection could not convince those to whom spiritual life was meaningless. Jesus offered these people the supreme example of spiritual life, — himself. They had watched him; they had wondered at his purity and his tranquillity; they had heard his words of strength; they had seen his translucency,

— the glory of the eternal world shining through his truthful manhood. If all that was without effect, — if they had seen him, yet believed not, — what could possibly move them to believe? Alas! men to-day see it all, yet believe not.

Jesus now tells the listeners that though they may refuse to walk it, his new and living Way has not been cast up in vain. What he has been saying to them consists of larger truths than they dream. The door is open wide, and faces many ways. "All that the Father giveth me shall reach me; and him that cometh to me I will in no wise cast out."

Here is, first, a reminder that others will accept Jesus, if they do not. They enjoy a rare privilege in hearing Christ's words; but a rarer lies in being one of those natures whom God's dealings with them have made hungry for spiritual food. Blessed are the poor in spirit, whom God has caused to know that they are poor. Every one who has been prepared for Christ, every spirit which the Father of spirits gives him, inevitably gravitates toward Christ, inevitably reaches Christ.

Next is Christ's note of great assurance to the sinful and the fearful, — one more winsome word for the individuals in the company who may be almost persuaded: None who come to him will be thrust away. Here, before the eyes of that querulous populace, the Saviour of mankind opens a door for inquirers to remotest ages. It is shut to none. Whoso fails to go in thereat is assured that the fault is his, not God's or Christ's. "I cannot be received," says one; "for I am steeped in vice." "I will in no wise cast you out," replies the Son of man. "I have cared for nothing but the world and myself," cries another. "I will in no wise cast you out," is the answer. "I am a hardened backslider," wails a third. "I will in no wise cast you out," repeats the



voice divine. "I have slighted grace, trampled on love, and rejected the Spirit," we hear from a fourth. "I will in no wise cast you out," rings forth still the everlasting Gospel. Is it possible for Love to say more? Not one soul that ever genuinely comes to our Lord Jesus Christ will be rejected.

Christ proceeds to indicate the perfect harmony of this work of his with his Father's will. "I came down from heaven, not to do mine own will, but the will of him that sent me." Men are not to think of him as separate in his interests or purposes from the Father. He works on no limited lines. He is come, not to save a few favorites of his own, but to fulfil the broad and benign will of him who created all men. He himself is lost in that eternal will.

Where did men get the phrase that "God outside of Christ is a consuming fire"? It is not in scripture. It was born of that perverse theological spirit which is so zealous for Christ as to be willing to belittle and blaspheme God. Against all impurity the Son is as much a consuming fire as the Father; toward the wayward the Father is as deeply and everlastingly tender as the Son. God so loved the world that he sent his Son. The Father's will was Christ's impulse and support. Beyond its reach, outside its gracious sweep, he never went so much as in thought. When we come to Christ, what do we but yield to the Father? Our immediate and cordial reception is assured because that is the Father's will.

Christ's final thought in this lesson is that he who trusts himself to Christ takes no hazard. Nothing which the Father gives to the Son can be lost. "This is the will of him that sent me, that of all which he hath given I should lose nothing, but should raise it up at the last day." How broad this asseveration! The neuter is used, and suggests the whole of that creation now subject to "the bondage of cor-



ruption." Does the Great Teacher mean a palingenesis when it shall be evident

"That not a worm is cloven in vain;"

that all which seems to us to be human wreckage but subserves the weal of humanity; and that of nothing, animate or inanimate, given him by his Father, can there be such a thing as absolute loss? So much we cannot affirm, though Paul's picture, in Romans viii., of the complete Christian redemption, comprehends no less. But we may at least be certain that in the use of the neuter the Lord intends to make his pledge to your soul and mine broad enough to scatter all our fears. For he follows this general assurance with a promise still more explicit touching the individual believer: "This is the will of my Father, that every one that beholdeth the Son and believeth on him should have life eternal, and I will raise him up at the last day."

An Alpine guide held out his hand for a traveller to step upon. There was no other footing; an abyss was beneath. The man hesitated. But the guide said, "That hand never lost a man." That is what Jesus says to every hesitating soul: through all the centuries he has never lost a man who trusted him. Yet he does not, after all, appeal to human experience to substantiate his declaration. We are not competent judges; we see apparent failures of apparent believers: but into the future of their lives, or into their deepest hearts, we cannot see at all. So Jesus argues the security of trust in him solely by reference to the will of the Father. He assures us that his hand can never lose a man; and when we ask for a voucher, he points to the indefeasible will of the Father.

"This is reasoning in a circle," says some honest sceptic. "Your famous Teacher appeals to the validity of faith to prove that faith is valid. He should ground his assertion

on tangible human experience, not on assumption." But what human experience other than faith can prove the worth of faith? To the dead no evidence can show life to be valuable. No series of data without human life can prove the existence of human life. Eternal life is an affair of individual consciousness, its security a matter of individual faith. Eternal life, just as Jesus taught, rests wholly on faith in the eternal Father. "This is life eternal, that they should know thee, the only true God, and him whom thou didst send, even Jesus Christ," is Christ's own definition. Faith in the Father is before all and under all. Jesus attested his divine spirituality by constant appeals to the Father. Men were to believe in him because they believed in God. No firmer guarantee could be given of his power to keep forever all that was committed to him than simply that it was his Father's will.

Let us sum up. To the listeners at the lakeside in Galilee, as to all who will listen now, the Saviour's loving message is: "Work for the Bread of eternity which I offer, because the Father hath sent me to give it you. Believe on me, because I am that Bread, and faith in me is the work which the Father desires from you. Not one who trusts me will I thrust away, because that is not only my will, but the will of him that sent me. I shall lose nothing of all that is mine, but will at the last day raise up every soul that by faith in me enters into the life eternal. This, too, is my Father's will, which cannot fail.

"Lo, I am come!

In the roll of the book it is written of me:

I delight to do thy will, O my God!"

Such, friends, is the lesson of Saviourhood, born out of Fatherhood.

Lesson IX. August 30.

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## CHRIST AT THE FEAST.

*John vii: 31-44.*

BY REV. O. P. GIFFORD, BROOKLINE, MASS.

THE Feast of Tabernacles fell upon the fifteenth day of the seventh month, — the close of September and the beginning of October, — and was celebrated during eight days. It served the double purpose of commemorating the forty years' wandering in the desert and the annual harvest of the fruits of the earth. During the week of the feast the people dwelt in tents made of boughs, placed upon the roofs of houses, in the streets and open places of the city, and by the roadside without the walls. The city and its immediate surroundings were transformed into a camp of green branches. The gathered thousands gave themselves to rites recalling the painful pilgrimage of the wandering Israelites, and God's care of his people. A daily libation made in the temple reminded of the water gushing from the rock. Two candelabra, lighted at eventide, symbolized the pillar of fire and cloud. To the seven days' feast the law added an eighth, as a memorial, possibly, of Israel's entrance into the Promised Land. Josephus calls this day the most sacred in the Hebrew year. Passover, Pentecost, and Tabernacles were the chief Jewish festivals. Every Jew was expected to attend at least one of the three; Jesus had absented himself from the other two.

The third day of the week Jesus suddenly appears in the

eastern, or Solomon's, porch, teaching the people. His words stirred them to the depths, as the waters of the Galilean lake were wont to be stirred by the winds rushing down from Mount Lebanon. The hearers were greatly excited. His truth, he answers them, is divine in its origin, his authority is God, not Rabbinic precedent, — nay, he is himself sent from God. Some are moved to faith, others to more bitter opposition. The temple-guard is ordered to seize him on the first occasion that offers.

“The last, the great day of the feast” comes, and Jesus is again in the temple. The pilgrims, in festive array, leave their booths at daybreak to share in the services, each carrying a *lulabh* — branches of myrtle, willow, and palm bound together — in his right hand, and the fruit or boughs of the goodly tree, the paradise-apple, in his left. Thus provided, the worshippers divided into three bands. One remained in the temple to attend the morning sacrifice. The second went to a place called Moza, where they cut down willow-branches, with which they made a leafy canopy over the altar. The third followed, to the sound of music, a priest bearing a golden pitcher. At the fountain-gate within the city wall was the Pool of Siloam, — the King's Pool of Nehemiah, — made by King Hezekiah to divert from a besieging army the spring of Gihon, which could not be brought within the city wall, and yet to bring its water within the city. Hence the name “Sent” (a conduit), or “Siloah,” as Josephus calls it.

Reaching the Pool of Siloam, the priest filled the pitcher and returned, followed by the procession, reaching the temple just as they were laying the pieces of sacrifice on the great altar of burnt offering. Welcomed by a three-fold blast of the trumpet, he entered the “water-gate,” — named from this ceremony, — and passed into the court of the priests. Here another priest joined him, bearing the wine of the drink-offering. The two ascended the rise of the altar and

turned to the left. Here were two silver funnels with narrow openings, leading down to the base of the altar. The wine was poured into the eastern, the water into the western funnel. Following this came the responsive chant of the Great Hallel, Psalms cxiii. to cxviii. inclusive. The outpouring of this water was the central ceremony of the feast.

As the memorial service ended, Jesus, standing by, lifted up his voice and said, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink." The call was not an interruption, but an interpretation of the feast. The rite symbolized the outpouring of the Holy Spirit. "This spake he of the Spirit," says John. Thus speaking amid the great historic and prophetic festival of Judaism, Jesus claims to fulfil it in himself. What the smitten Rock was to the perishing Israelites, sustaining life, that he is to a thirsty race on the pilgrimage of life. All that the Jews longed for, all that had been prophesied concerning the coming of the Spirit, he claims to fulfil. The claim is one of the most comprehensive which Jesus ever made. Not only is he teaching truth from God, and of himself as sent by God, but he is also the great Reservoir or Fountain of spiritual life and power for all mankind. He is the Smitten Rock on the edge of the wilderness of life,—the Rock that followed Israel through its long wandering in the wilderness, the Divine Presence which then accompanied and supplied the needs of the chosen people. The not yet incarnate Son of God was the Leader of Israel. The ascended Christ is the Leader of the human race; he is the Pool of Siloam within the city walls of the New Jerusalem. The river of the water of life springs from the throne of the Lamb; the throne, symbol of absolute rule, is the fountain of the water of life; by the river's banks grows the tree which is for healing and for food. In all his assumption of divine sonship and power, Jesus never made a more sweeping claim than this.

On this triple declaration made by Jesus Christ we have three closely related thoughts.

1. Jesus Christ the Reservoir of spiritual power.
2. Believers in Christ channels of spiritual power.
3. Faith in Jesus Christ the condition of spiritual power.

1. Jesus Christ is the world's great Reservoir of spiritual power. The eternal, uncreated, self-existent God works through the agency of his Son. "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, which is in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him," "given an exegesis" of him. As the preacher unfolds, declares, makes known the treasures of truth hidden in a text, so Christ hath unfolded, declared, made known the life of God. As the tree, through fibre, leaf, flower, and fruit, unfolds and brings to view the treasure that is in the seed, so Christ hath unfolded in deed and word and life the very essence of God. Christ's life and teachings are an unfolding of God, "for in him dwelleth all the fulness of the Godhead bodily." "All things were made by him, and without him was not anything made that was made." "Who is the image of the invisible God, the firstborn before every created thing; for by him were all things created that are in heaven and that are in earth, visible and invisible, whether they be thrones, or dominions, or principalities, or powers: all things were created by him and for him; and he is before all things, and by him all things consist." God "hath in these last days spoken unto us by his Son, whom he hath appointed heir of all things, by whom also he made the worlds; who being the brightness of his glory, and the express image of his person, and upholding all things by the word of his power, when he had by himself purged our sins, sat down on the right hand of the Majesty on high."

The visible universe in its ordered and splendid beauty is

the expression of God through Jesus Christ. The thought that lies back of all the visible signs of Nature, and that waits only the spiritual body to become known to man, is the thought of God in Christ. The spiritual Gulf-stream that has tempered human history and softened the winter of the world's sin, is an outflow from Christ. The heat and light that have turned winter to summer and night to day, in spite of sin, are the outpouring of Christ's life upon a world that lieth in the Wicked One.

Jesus was born in Bethlehem of Judæa, "God manifest in the flesh." The Church of Christ was born in Jerusalem, and is the Holy Spirit manifest in the flesh. But the coming of the Spirit depended upon the going of the Christ: only as he returned to the Father could the Spirit come to man. "The testimony of Jesus is the spirit of prophecy." As the light comes to the eye laden with pictures of the world without, so the spirit of prophecy comes laden with witness to Jesus. That spirit fell upon the eye of Abraham's soul. He saw Christ's day and was glad. The same spirit fell upon the soul of Moses; he esteemed "the reproach of Christ greater riches than the treasures of Egypt." It fell upon David's soul, and he burst into song; upon the soul of Isaiah, and his words kindled the eastern horizon of the coming day with the splendid light of prophecy.

The spirit of prophecy was laden with the testimony of Jesus as the winds are laden with the perfume of flowers when they come to us across the blooming fields of June. "The prophecy came not in old time by the will of man: but holy men of God spake as they were moved by the Holy Ghost." Speaking as they were moved, they filled their prophecies with the person and kingdom of Jesus. Cutting an apple into thin slices at right angles with the core, and holding the slices up to the light, you will see the outline of the flower that foretold the fruit. Prophecy has



become history. So in the life of Jesus you find packed away the prophecy of the ages. He sent forth the spirit of prophecy, preparing men for his coming, then gathered the prophecies back into himself in fulfilment. Luke tells us, xxiv. 27, that "beginning at Moses and all the prophets, he expounded in all the scriptures the things concerning himself." The writer of the Epistle to the Hebrews proves that all the Old Testament ritual was simply the shadow, Christ being the reality. But the reality exists before the shadow. Through the Spirit Christ threw an outline shadow of himself on Jewish life in forms and ceremonies. Through the Spirit he filled the heart of the Hebrew people with a passionate longing for himself. After his ascension he poured out the Spirit without measure. Peter's interpretation of the pentecostal blessing is found in Acts ii. 32, 33. "This Jesus hath God raised up, whereof we all are witnesses. Therefore being by the right hand of God exalted, and having received of the Father the promise of the Holy Ghost, he hath shed forth this, which ye now see and hear." Thus the fulfilment of all the mighty prophecies of the past touching spiritual power are in the care of Jesus. The Holy Spirit comes to honor Christ, to bring to mind truths he has taught, to take of Christ's things and show them to us, to convict of sin when Jesus is doubted, to regenerate the human heart, and to people the earth with a spiritual race. From the laying of the corner-stone of the universe to the last finishing touch, Christ is the fountain of spiritual energy; from the alphabet to the completed thought of God perfectly expressed, Christ is the "Word;" from the keynote through all the age-long training of the orchestra and chorus to the perfect harmony, Christ is the theme.

The cry on the day of the feast, "If any man thirst, let him come unto me and drink," is Christ's call to the human race: spiritual thirst is as widespread as the race. To be

a man is to thirst for God. It is also a revelation of the only place where the thirst can be satisfied; for in Christ is stored the spiritual life and might of the universe.

2. Believers in Christ are channels of spiritual power. Christ not only satisfies the thirst of the man who comes and drinks, but changes the empty life into a flowing fountain, a source of life to others. The Samaritan woman by the well-side simply wanted the water of life, that she might herself be satisfied. But she has to tell her story, and no sooner has she done this than "many of the Samaritans of that city believed on him for the saying of the woman." Again and again the disciples went out to teach and heal in the name and power of Christ, and found that the spiritual energy that had marked his words and works marked theirs in turn. After the Pentecostal blessing the apostles became gushing springs of spiritual life, churches sprang up about them like oases about springs in the desert, their sermons were springs of living water, their epistles were reservoirs of spiritual inspiration, their very touch brought health to the diseased, life to the dead, and at one time the streets were lined with the sick, "that at least the shadow of Peter passing by might overshadow some of them; and they were healed every one." Silver and gold they had none, spiritual power they had. Silver and gold we have, spiritual power we in large measure lack. The early victories of the Church were along the lines laid down by Christ. Each little band of Christians became a centre of spiritual life. The early Christians were not soldiers. Their victories were not won by the sword. They were not statesmen, they did not rule in the forum. They were not millionnaires, they did not control markets. They served the Prince of Peace, wielding only "the sword of the Spirit." They did not make or interpret laws. They did not appear on the world's "Change." Yet as the winter snows melt at the

touch of the south wind and flow down in quickening streams, the civilization, customs, and manners of a pagan empire changed form under the new influence. Wherever the stored sunlight which we call coal is touched by the finger of fire, the treasured heat and light pour out again ; wherever these spirit-filled men were obedient to the touch of the risen Christ, his life and light flowed forth again. The Bride of Christ not only carried the name, but wielded the might of her absent yet present Lord. His promises were signed by him, and left blank for her to fill. Right royally did she dispense the Bridegroom's treasures. As the dynamo finds expression in the carbon point, Christ found expression through his followers, till the night of sin was flooded with the glory of salvation. Every follower of Christ became a river source, living water flowing from him. Deserts were changed to gardens ; a new civilization grew up, adapted to the world's needs. These men carried life with them. Each one became a rock in Horeb, and the people drank. Smitten by persecution, they gave spiritual life the more freely. The rock was turned into a standing water, the flint into a fountain of waters.

Ezekiel's vision found fulfilment, the deepening waters carried life and health, the sanctuary stream gave the world food and health ; it was a fountain for sin and for uncleanness, living water ran east and west both summer and winter. Every believer became a temple of the Holy Ghost, and thus a source of life. Unlimited life and health flowed from each. Christ's promise is undated. Unchangeable himself, his purpose and power abide the same to-day as when his challenge rang out over the thousands on the feast-day. He is willing and able, not only to satisfy the seeking soul, but to make every man a source of everlasting weal to others. The Spirit was poured out upon all flesh on the day of Pentecost. As the oil given by the prophet filled every

vessel set forth, and was of equal value, no matter what the shape of the dish, so the Spirit of Christ is given to all, and fills each, bringing its own power with it, and giving this power to every one who takes it in.

3. The condition to the attainment of spiritual power. There is but one condition of spiritual power: it is faith. "He that believeth on me, as the scripture hath said, out of his belly shall flow rivers of living water." The New Testament lays strong emphasis on faith as a condition of salvation, and here Christ conditions spiritual power on faith. "Without faith it is impossible to please God," or man either. Distrust sets a limit to the good which one man can do another. The farmer must have faith in his seed, or he will not sow it; the sailor must have faith in his ship, or he will not leave land upon it; the merchant must have faith in the money presented, or he will not give goods in return for it; the student must have faith in the teacher, or what is in the teacher cannot flow into the student. Friendship between man and man depends upon faith; so does friendship between man and God. The spiritual power in Christ cannot flow into man except the hand of faith lift the gate and let in the flood. What comes to the farmer may or may not justify his faith in the seed, but nothing at all will come without faith enough to sow. The ship may fail the sailor, but he will never leave the shore unless he has faith enough to risk himself. The money may prove counterfeit, but there can be no buying and selling without faith. The teacher may have neither knowledge nor inspiration for the student, but the student will find neither without faith and trial. Faith is simply persuasion,—a consideration of something as true, a crediting, a placing of confidence in something. Faith is persuasion: he who believes is he who is persuaded that a man or a thing is worthy of confidence. The word for "faith" in Greek comes from a root meaning "to bind."

As in Latin *fides*, "faith," and *fœdus*, "a treaty," are related, so the word "to bind" and the word "faith" in Greek are related. Treaties are made between parties that have some confidence in each other, and the compact, being kept, strengthens the faith. So a man is persuaded that Christ is trustworthy, and then trusts to him; and the result deepens the confidence. This being persuaded, argues a study of proof. Men are not persuaded of the truth of a statement or of the trustworthiness of a person by ignorance or a refusal to study the claims made. "Faith cometh by hearing." We pay heed to what others have found, and persuaded of the truth of their assertions, yield faith, when what was true for them becomes true for us. The first disciples of Jesus saw and heard him. From this sprang up their confidence in him. As they trusted him, he proved himself true to them. They yielded more and more to him, and with this came increased proof. Having proved him for themselves, they preached to others what they had seen and heard and handled of the Word of Life. These, persuaded in turn, had faith, and this faith deepened and broadened as the years went by. To-day we have the written statements of what these men knew, believed, trusted, and, as it were, experimented with scientifically. We take their statements, study them carefully, and are persuaded they told the truth. The conviction deepens with study. We yield ourselves to the Christ, and he proves himself to be all we thought. The promises taken into the soul by faith, as seed is sown, thrust down root, spring up, and bear fruit. As we believe, the promised power comes, and we become in very truth sources of spiritual power. The only limit to this power is the limit which we ourselves set, by a spirit of unbelief. Deeper study, a scientific spirit of testing Christ, proves that he is all he claims, in that he gives us all he promises.

## Lesson X. September 6.

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### THE TRUE CHILDREN OF GOD.

*John viii: 31-47.*

BY REV. W. H. P. FAUNCE, NEW YORK CITY.

THE frankness of Jesus draws us to him. Like the surgeon's knife, it awakens our gratitude even while it cuts into our quivering flesh. This lesson is a memorable example of the remorselessness of perfect love. Jesus is speaking to certain "Jews which had believed him." That they were not full disciples may be indicated by the fact that they are still described as "Jews," and that they did not believe *on* him, like the hearers mentioned in the previous verse, but simply "believed him." They acknowledged his claims in a slight and superficial way, but did not yield themselves to him as Master and Lord. Therefore Jesus pursues his usual method of testing new disciples by the utterance of searching and startling truths. At his very first sentence these professed followers are surprised, offended, and made indignant; their pride of race and position is wounded. But Jesus with a swift succession of fearless sentences lets in the light and lays bare the Jewish heart. The object of the following dialogue is to show to the Jews, and to us who now read it, the utter and irreconcilable antagonism between their position and his, and to make it appear that whoso turns from Christ, clearly seen, turns to the dark, and does so because of a spiritual affinity and inward alliance with the kingdom of darkness; while, on the other

hand, love to Christ, instead of being a mere personal acknowledgment, is the evidence and avenue of affinity with the infinite Father: whoso loves Christ is God's child.

The course of thought is quite clear, and the record, though of course it is not a stenographic or verbatim report, bears on its face the naturalness and freedom of an actual conversation.

The first truth on which Jesus insists is that only *persistent discipleship brings freedom*. If these Jews would become "truly" his disciples, they must "abide in his word:" that is, live in and by the truth which he brought into the world, — precisely as a tree finds steadfastness and nourishment by abiding in the soil. Through such genuine discipleship they would attain knowledge and freedom. To "know the truth" is to come into most intimate relation to it. It is not to hold certain propositions and dogmas, and feel assured that they are correct; such holding may be abject slavery, and such a man may utterly fail to be affected by the truth. Christ did not come into the world to give us a set of correct opinions: he came that we might have life. To know the truth is to clasp it with might, mind, and soul, to yield utterly and forever to the message which the Son of God has brought.

It is clear that such knowing brings freedom, — freedom from superstition, from care, from fear, from the traditions of men, from sin; and that no other liberty is genuine. In the moral world freedom comes only through submission to law. A really free soul is steadfast as the stars in their courses. This truth finds noble expression in Wordsworth's "Ode to Duty," with its fine closing line, —

"In the light of truth thy bondman let me live!"

But Jesus in his demands goes far beyond all our ethical teachers. He requires submission, not merely to "duty" or



"law" or "truth," but to himself. To bow to Christ is to share the freedom of deity. To take Christ's yoke is to break every other yoke. Freedom, individual or national, social or spiritual, is not carved out by the sword or wrought out by plough or by pen; it comes through subjection to the truth, which in its last analysis is submission to Christ.

But the Jews object that Christ's talk about freedom is irrelevant, since they were and always had been free. "We were never in bondage to any man." Had they forgotten Pharaoh and Egypt, Sennacherib and Babylon? Had they forgotten whose "image and superscription" was even then written all over Palestine? But in one sense this was true,—they had never been reduced to literal and legal slavery. Always they had claimed to be a free nation, having no God but Jehovah, no king save his anointed. "How then sayest thou," they cried, "Ye shall be made free?" In answer Jesus unfolds the enslaving power of sin in words that may be the germ of Paul's awful personification of sin: "It is no longer I, but sin that dwelleth in me." The worst slavery is that of which we, like these Jews, are unconscious. To feel our chains is the beginning of release. To sin is to part with liberty, to come under the dominion of an alien and hostile power. "The slave of sin:" who can fathom the depths of degradation which those words imply! Yet Jesus is describing his audience. Discipleship or slavery!—this is the alternative which he presses home in this discourse.

Jesus now probes deeper, and affirms that the hostile attitude of these Jews is to be found in their affinity with the entire realm of evil. Their spiritual parentage is the secret of their present dislike of Jesus. A man's deeds are those of his moral father. Isolated sins are impossible. All sin, so far as we can see it, is like Melchizedek, "having

neither beginning of days nor end of life." Every wrong deed has a hideous ancestry and a numerous progeny. "If the assassination could trammel up the consequence!" But no earthly power can trammel up the consequence of wrong, and no human mind can see where wrong began. We talk of *sins*, Christ, of *sin*. He speaks, not of divers faults and frailties and mal-adjustments, but of the universal taint and poison, — sin. Paganism had its abstract virtues to be commended and vices to be avoided; Christianity sees all virtues as rooted in that holiness "without which no man shall see the Lord," and all vices as phases of the one great malady. To speak of *a sin* or *a virtue* is almost entirely contrary to New Testament usage and to the thought of Christ. He saw no human act alone, but always in its eternal relations. He looked before and after, and dealt not with transitory symptoms but with the racial difficulty. He was no moral lecturer with a code of spiritual etiquette. Men are not to be saved by applying to their conduct any *index expurgatorius*. Fruits come only from roots. Men may judge us by our fruits, all else being to them invisible; but God judges by our roots. Back of all that men can see, or that we can ourselves see, back of all purpose and volition, in the sub-conscious region of the soul, is the root which leads toward the light or toward the darkness, and feeds and controls all our moral life. The Gospel is a remedy for the roots of human nature, not a scheme to hang fresh fruit on rotten boughs. Goodness and badness are not in certain single deeds that can be catalogued and classified, so that destiny is decided according to the preponderance of one kind of deeds over the other, — this is the popular and shallow view. "Deep conceptions of sin and of grace are the notes of a true theology." Good and evil depend on moral relations and affinities. A good man is such by virtue of his union with infinite goodness, and a bad man is such by virtue of his

union with all evil. "An evil man out of the evil treasury of his heart:" what a frightful *thesaurus* of sin does the evil man carry within! "But a good man out of his good treasury:" however such a man's deeds may stumble and falter, the "treasury" is behind, and shall surely express itself at last in a pure and perfect life. Such a treasury is supplied from heaven. In the memorable antithesis of Jesus: "I do the things which I have seen with my Father, and ye also do the things which ye have heard from your father."

Is this a clear indorsement of the Jewish belief in a personal devil? It is not easy to explain it otherwise. Jesus everywhere falls in with that belief, whencesoever it was derived, and apparently assumes such a being even in the Lord's Prayer. We may say, of course, that this was a rhetorical rather than a philosophical assumption, and we may find it easier to construct a theodicy without a Satan. But we must remember that all moral evil as we know it is personal, and we may well remember also the question of a modern thinker: "What is the use of getting rid of the devil, if the devilish still remains?"

In this lesson the doctrine of the fatherhood of God finds its necessary limitations. This truth of the divine fatherhood over all human beings has received special emphasis in our day, and it cannot be emphasized too much. Even to the idolatrous Athenians Paul said: "We are his offspring." He is the Father of the saved and the lost, of the prodigal among the swine as truly as of the elder brother in the home. All human barriers fade and shrivel in the presence of Christ's word, "Our Father." Yet in the deepest sense, the sense of this lesson, God is the Father only of those who recognize him as such and live in filial communion with him. He cannot sustain the same relation to Nero and to Paul, to Augustine and to Attila. Again we

face the terrible antithesis of Jesus: "My Father . . . your father."

We notice three results of this hostility of the Jews to Jesus.

1. Jesus is to them unintelligible. "Why do ye not understand my speech?" "My word hath no advance in you." The divine word struck against them as against heavy armor, and could make no "advance" into their souls. They heard him speak in an unknown tongue. He is utterly a riddle to them, almost as to creatures living in space of two dimensions our physical life of three dimensions would appear monstrous and self-contradictory. To incapacity explanations are useless. Their organ of spiritual apprehension was atrophied. As the blind man thought the color red like the "sound of a trumpet," so does the sordid, petty, blinded soul reduce spiritual phenomena to the level of its own capacity, and reject what cannot be expressed in terms of its own experience. To how much of the modern world is the teaching of Christ still puzzling and absurd! To the spirit which looks on life as an arena for commercial gladiators, to the spirit enslaved by selfishness or fear or hate, the Sermon on the Mount is a mystery, martyrs are fanatics, and Jesus the insoluble enigma of history.

2. They reject the truth. "Because I say the truth, ye believe me not." These men played fast and loose with their own convictions. Again they showed their spiritual affinity, for Satan "is a liar and the father of the liar,"—so it seems best to understand the end of verse 44. Falsity to one's inner light, one's highest perceptions, involves falsity to God and to all men. To reject the best we know is always to reject God. Sublime is the picture of Cardinal Newman when at the great crisis in his life he lay at death's door in a foreign land, repeating: "I shall not die;

I have a work to do in England. I have not sinned against light, not against light." He had opposed and forsaken friends, church, and native land, but he had not failed to follow the "kindly Light."

3. They desire to kill Jesus. "Ye seek to kill me," not as a rabbi or prophet or king, but as "a man that hath told you the truth." Thus has evil ever sought to stab and burn and crucify the truth. It is the last step in opposition, the lowest level of sin, where one cries, "Eyil, be thou my good!"

Notice, finally, the pathetic appeal of the Sinless One. "If I say truth, why do ye not believe me?" This unanswered question still echoes through the ages. That voice was for three days silenced by Jewish malice and Roman despotism; but now from the heaven it speaks in tones that grow clearer with the lapse of years, tones that pierce through all our din and strife and make themselves heard in every soul: "*If I say truth, why do ye not believe me?*"

## Lesson XI. September 13.

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### CHRIST AND THE BLIND MAN.

*John ix: 1-11, 35-38.*

BY REV. P. S. MOXOM, BOSTON, MASS.

PASSING along one day, perhaps to the temple, Jesus "saw a man blind from his birth." It is evident that he gave him more than a glance, for the attention of the disciples was not arrested altogether, we may be sure, by the novelty of the case, but by the Master's earnest gaze. Their thoughts are revealed by the question they ask, just as Jesus' thoughts are revealed by the words: "As long as I am in the world, I am the Light of the world." To the disciples the blind man was a puzzling example of the principle, which in common with the Jews of that day they held, that every infirmity and affliction was the direct penal consequence of some specific sin. To Jesus the blind man was a striking expression of the spiritual helplessness and need of humanity, and the act of healing which he already contemplated was a suggestive type of his entire mission in the world.

The disciples, used to such pitiful spectacles, are but slightly moved to pity. The man has for them less a humane than a metaphysical interest. They begin to speculate. Not a more certain touch of nature appears in the narrative than this. The deepest problems of metaphysicians invade the thinking of the commonest men. "A metaphysical doubt to fishermen!" says Maurice. "Yes; and in the garrets and cellars of London metaphysical doubts

are presented to you by men immeasurably more ignorant than were those fishermen even before Jesus called them,—the very doubts with which the schools are occupied, only taking a living, practical form.”

“Master, who sinned, this man, or his parents, that he should be born blind?”

The question illustrates many of the speculative difficulties into which men fall. They form or adopt their theories of God, the world, and life, and then run upon facts that do not fit the theories. How seldom it occurs to them that in such cases theories, and not facts, must change; that facts, clearly seen and comprehensively grasped, are the necessary basis of all theories worth holding or likely to endure.

Jesus once said: “Except ye . . . become as little children, ye shall not enter into the kingdom of heaven.” What is it to become as little children, but to rid the mind of prejudgments, and to present a frank and receptive heart to the teaching of God in the facts of revelation and life? Christ’s reply overthrows at once the pharisaic dogma that led men to infer specific guilt from specific affliction. “Neither this man sinned, nor his parents.” This is not a denial of imperfection in parents and son, or of a connection between sin and physical ill, but it is a declaration that the blindness was not a punishment. It says that not all ill is to be traced to individual wickedness. Pain and sorrow are not in the world merely as a castigation for human sin. Jesus’ words suggest the deep, true philosophy of evil. This man’s blindness came, “that the works of God should be made manifest in him.” The tragic experiences of human life are made the means of revealing God’s power and goodness. Every pain and sorrow, and even the sins of men, are opportunity for God. That which so baffles our shallow thinking is instrumental to the accomplishment of God’s beneficent purposes. What we consider and sometimes resent as inex-



plicable evil, God suffers in order that his works may be made manifest. In this direction, at least, lies the reconciling truth that shall

“Vindicate the ways of God to men.”

God’s “works” are works of wisdom, love, righteousness, and salvation. By them he reveals himself and his glory. The process of man’s redemption and spiritual education is the process of the divine self-disclosure and the true divine self-exaltation. God’s love triumphs not in spite of evil so much as through evil; and thus what seems the quite remediless disaster of the world becomes tributary to the enlargement of life.

To Jesus the presence of ill was no discouragement, but an incentive to labor. It stirred the pulse of his pity, love, and action. His spirit went forth to meet it with the exultant passion of the Saviour-heart. So ought it to be with us. The pains, sorrows, and wants of men are opportunities to us as they were to him. Jesus says: “We” — not “I,” as in the common version — “We must work the works of him who sent me.” Jesus declares it to be his mission to “work the works of God,” — to heal the sick, feed the hungry, console the sad, refresh the weary, inspire the discouraged, enlighten the blind, cleanse the foul, strengthen the weak, and raise the dead. These things “we must do.” No Sabbath law of hair-splitting rabbins can interfere with this “must.” Ordinances and precepts are subordinate to the real interests of men. Not this law or that convention, but man, is of first importance.

Jesus here further identifies himself with men in his express consciousness of limitation. He looked at life as we must look at it. For him in his earthly state all life was concentrated in the present. Opportunity and duty are now, he says. His night’s advancing shadow is seen in the omin-

ous hostility that thickens about him. Soon his earthly work will end. The day is the time for action. Whatever of experience or achievement the future may hold for him, present duty impels him as if all eternity hung upon it. There is, indeed, in his sense of the brevity of life no nervous fear and no regret, but a solemn earnestness. Whatsoever his hand finds to do, he must do with his might. That is the true temper. Man's duty is to live fruitfully, careless of death, careful only of using for good, to the full measure of its possibility, each moment as it comes. Even Jesus, with the cross before him, and the great spiritual crisis of his earthly experience thrusting itself upon him beforehand, slackens no whit his attention to the business of the moment. Such is the true life of faith, doing the work that lies next, and leaving the future with God.

The words, "While I am in the world I am the Light of the world," clearly bring out Christ's sense of his mission. The blind world is typified in the blind man. He is shut out from the sweet light of day. The multitudes, by their ignorance or perverseness, lose the sweeter light of love and truth. This distressing defect makes Jesus feel the significance of his presence on earth. "I am the Light of the world." "I am the Life of the world." He came that men might have life, and have it abundantly. God is light, and in him is no darkness. God is life; in him man lives and moves and has his being. In the Son, God discloses and imparts himself as both the light and the life of mankind. Congenital blindness has in it to man's natural sense that element of hopelessness which the darkness of the unregenerate heart has to our quickened spiritual sense. As Jesus confronted physical blindness with power to turn the opaque eyeballs into open windows, through which earth and heaven might pour their surprising beauty and grandeur upon the waiting mind of the mendicant, so has he power to heal men's spir-

itual blindness, to open in their souls avenues through which shall pour floods of divine beauty and truth.

It is significant that in this instance Jesus healed without being asked. The mute appeal of need was enough. Besides, not the subject alone of the miracle, but the disciples and the Pharisees and the multitude, needed the lesson of the miracle. It was an illumination as well as a healing, bringing a burst of light from Heaven itself.

Christ's use of spittle and clay may have been a concession to the limitations of his observers. Many believed these substances to possess medicinal virtues. But the main reason seems to have been that he might gain time. He was seeking the man's soul. The healing might be too sudden to accomplish the Master's full purpose. The anointing, the journey to the pool, the washing, and the return, all gave the man time to think, to adjust his mind to the new experience that was breaking upon him, to reflect upon the great Personality through whom he was to receive not only eyesight but vision of soul.

What a moment was that when the blessed light first broke in upon him,—the infinitely various landscape, the golden sun, the blue, unfathomable sky! Recall Milton's lament, in the third book of "Paradise Lost," over his loss of sight, beginning, "Hail, holy light!" Oh, the rapturous song that, had the experience been reversed, might have poured from the poet's heart!

The man "went away therefore, and washed, and came seeing." Astonishment possesses all. There is even incredulity as to the man's identity. But the man says, "I am he. A man called Jesus made clay, and anointed my eyes, and said to me, Go to the pool of Siloam and wash. And I went away and washed, and received sight."

Great issues both for the man and for the Pharisees are bound up in this "mighty work," — salvation for him,

judgment for them. When the people heard that it was Jesus who opened the blind man's eyes, they asked, "Where is he?" The man said, "I know not." He knew simply that one called Jesus had healed him. Who Jesus was, he knew not; one thing he knew, that whereas he had been blind, he now could see.

As the fact of his experience was not dependent on any theory, so the fact of his cure was not dependent on his understanding the process, or even knowing who wrought it. He knew the name, but not as yet the personality. He knew Jesus simply as an unseen presence and as the gracious dispenser of marvellous power; that was all.

You may be delivered from spiritual blindness, and at first not know who set you free. There is in many men, perhaps in all, a susceptibility to divine influence which lies below conscious faith. Sometimes God works savingly in the soul before he is revealed to consciousness as the Saviour. All highest vision, all perception of spiritual good, whether in Christian, Jew, or Pagan, is from God. He is "the Light that lighteth every man who cometh into the world." Sooner or later God discloses himself, shining to give the regenerated subject "the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." But the regeneration of the world is not limited by the conscious perception which men now have of him who saves.

The colloquy between the healed man and the Pharisees is most interesting and instructive. The Pharisees have the worst of it, despite all their advantage of position, culture, and dialectical skill. They speak from a theory, he out of experience. They appeal to their system, he to invincible fact. They are beaten, and, furious on this account, promptly adopt the usual resort of bigots in their conflict with reason, — that of force; they cast him out of the synagogue. It is established "orthodoxy" dealing with dissent. Vital experi-

ence counts for little with Pharisees unless it conform to precedent and dogma.

"Jesus heard that they had cast him out." This man has accepted risks for his unknown Healer. The Healer now takes risks for him. Men who pretend to be the ministers of truth and salvation doubt, despise, and reject him. Jesus seeks and finds him, and conveys to him, excommunicate though he is, a better blessing than even sight. "Finding him, he said, Dost thou believe on the Son of God?" The answer is childlike in its simplicity. "Who is he, Lord, that I may believe on him?" The heart is ready for faith. It is not a mere benefactor whom this man apprehends now. He has grown rapidly. Blindness has been taken from soul as well as from body. His very trial has opened his heart for the coming revelation. This One who has healed him, and whom till now he has never seen, this One to whom he has already borne witness and for whom he has already suffered, is no longer a mere voice, nor merely "a man called Jesus," but a prophet of the living God,—nay, the Messiah and Son of God himself. The questioning heart already anticipates the answer. "Jesus said unto him, Thou hast both seen him, and he it is that speaketh with thee." Blessed moment of faith ripening into assurance! "And he said, Lord, I believe. And he worshipped him."

Let us note three or four simple lessons from this significant story.

1. We may learn from it to abstain from those superficial and dogmatic judgments on human life which, seeming to honor God with ready explanations of evil, really dishonor him, and which are often cruelly unjust to men. True faith as well as love "beareth all things, believeth all things, hopeth all things, endureth all things." Evil is in the world, and man is sinful as well as unfortunate. Wickedness works wretchedness, and penalty follows iniquity as echo follows

voice, or pain the incision of the knife. But not all pains are punishments. Let despairing as well as cynical doubt be silent. Great as sin is, God is greater. Where sin abounds, grace superabounds. This is not the devil's world, but God's. The blind, the miserable, the sorrowing, and the sinful are his children, whom he is leading to himself, and through whose very maladies and mistakes he is making his goodness and power more triumphantly to appear. Ask not whose sin causes this or that evil, but let evil and want everywhere be stimulus to working the works of God. It is easy to speculate, easy to build theories and to draw out dogmatic conclusions. And it is easy, alas ! to condemn. The great achievement is to *live* in the spirit of the patient, pitiful, and ever-helpful Son of God.

2. Let us learn that the supreme business of life is unselfish service, and that the time for service is *now*. The "day" is not only this brief lifetime, it is exigent need, it is present opportunity, it is power to do what lies before us. The "night" is not merely death, it is neglected need, lost opportunity, unused or wasted power. To serve and help men, and to do it now, is to "work the works of God while it is day;" and this is at once the true business, the satisfying joy, and the lasting glory of life.

Let others curiously question if they will, but do you follow Jesus, and draw souls with you to him.

"Ask God to give thee skill in comfort's art,  
That thou may'st consecrated be,  
And set apart unto a life of sympathy;  
For heavy is the weight of ill on every heart,  
And comforters are needed much  
Of Christ-like touch."

3. Let us learn the wisdom and power of Jesus' method in reaching men. He authenticates himself to men by his works as well as by his word,—not merely by miraculous

works, but by works that are divine in their goodness. The Healer and Helper of men thus convincingly justifies his claim of divine kinship. No argument has the force and breadth of this argument. He saves men, he opens blind eyes, he revives the sick of soul, he gives health and peace. The best apologetics we can find or use are in Jesus himself. "If I work not the works of my Father, believe me not." This is his own test. Works are to be judged, and in the long run are judged, not by the element of marvellousness in them, but by their character and purpose. So judged, the works of Jesus authenticate him as the Son of God and Saviour of the world. Bring men face to face with Jesus; then they too, like the blind man who was healed, will at last say, "Lord, I believe," and their faith will express itself in homage and service.

4. Finally, let us learn the true nature of faith. Faith is not mere credulity, it is an attitude and an act of the soul. Its object is not a proposition, but a person. It reposes not on greatness or power alone, but on goodness. We may believe many doctrines, yet what the doctrines are be of little moment. It is of unspeakable moment that we trust the living, loving God, who in his well-beloved Son reveals himself to our hearts and invites our worship. This is the question of questions which the seeker for souls will wisely and faithfully put: "Dost thou believe in the Son of God?" The assenting answer of the awakened heart to this inquiry is the confession of faith that carries in it the essence of truth in all the creeds, and witnesses to the triumph of divine love in the human soul.



Lesson XII. September 20.

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CHRIST THE GOOD SHEPHERD.

*John x : 1-16.*

BY REV. HENRY M KING, D. D., ALBANY, N. Y.

THE treatment which the blind beggar, whose eyes Christ had opened, received at the hands of the Pharisees, disclosed their character as false teachers and cruel guides of the people, and suggested the contrasts which Christ proceeded to draw. The emphatic words, "verily, verily," were never employed by Christ to begin a discourse, but were always used in the midst of a conversation to arrest the attention of his hearers and fix it upon the weighty import of the truths he was about to utter. Christ's parley with the Pharisees was not yet ended. Against the dark background of their heartlessness and falsehood he painted the charming picture of his own tender, self-sacrificing love, and the purpose of his divine mission on earth.

This he did in three parables, or rather similitudes, taken from a suggestive pastoral scene familiar in Oriental lands. The imagery was found in the every-day life of the Jews, and was frequent in their sacred literature. Nothing could have been more natural, or easily understood, or impressive. It was one of the great Teacher's skilful rhetorical uses of common scenes and events. It was the beautiful illustration of truth by life. It was the spiritualization of the earthly and the commonplace.

We can easily bring to our minds the scene which Christ and his hearers had in theirs. "A sheepfold in the East,"

says Godet, "is not a covered building like our stables, but a mere enclosure, surrounded by a wall or palisade. The sheep are brought into it in the evening, several flocks being generally assembled within it. The shepherds, after committing them to the care of a common keeper, the porter, who is charged with their safe-keeping during the night, retire to their homes. In the morning they return, and knock at the closely barred door of the enclosure, which the porter opens. They then separate each his own sheep, by calling them; and after having thus collected their flocks, lead them to the pastures. As to robbers, it is by scaling the wall that they penetrate into the fold." From this simple scene, still preserved in its essential features in the East, Christ not only exposed the true character of the Pharisees in their relation to the people, but unfolded some of the richest and sublimest truths about himself and his spiritual kingdom that ever fell from his lips. There are no words that contain more of the heart of the Gospel, and none that appeal more powerfully to the faith and affection of men.

The three similitudes form a gradational succession. Step by step Christ advanced in the development of his thought and the assertion of his high claims, cautiously preparing the way for the reception of himself and his truth. To have at the outset declared himself to be the good shepherd, with all that that title signified, would have been to close all hearts against him and doom himself to a unanimous rejection. As it was, notwithstanding all his precaution there was a new division among the Jews about him, and the majority of them said, "He hath a devil, and is mad." So difficult was it for Christ, as the Son of God, to win a recognition in the hearts of the men whom he came to save.

In the first similitude Christ drew a contrast between the false and the true spiritual teachers. With a single

breath he outlined the pharisaic character and spirit. "He that entereth not by the door into the sheepfold, but climbeth up some other way, the same is a thief and a robber." All admitted the simple statement of fact, though they did not see the application. The robber is known by his conduct and methods. He seeks the sheep, not for their good, but for his personal advantage. He neither loves the sheep nor is loved by them. On the other hand, the distinguishing marks of a shepherd are well known. He enters into the fold by the door that was made for that purpose. He has no thought and no need to seek admission in any other way. The porter knows him, and lets him in; and when he is in the fold the sheep know him, and follow him when he calls them by name. The picture is very simple and beautiful, and true to life. The sheepfold can hardly refer to the Jewish theocracy or the Christian Church as such, but rather to the whole company of devout, God-fearing, truth-loving souls, regardless of any organized fellowship or visible enclosure. Much of the language is drapery and costume. The porter is neither Moses, because the law leads to Christ, as Chrysostom taught, nor John the Baptist, the announcer of Christ and his kingdom, as Godet teaches, nor the Holy Spirit, as many others teach; but he is simply an embellishment of the picture, to make it more vivid and striking. Nor is it necessary to give to the door a spiritual meaning. Having seized the central thought or thoughts of the allegory, the imagery can be safely treated as such. The main thoughts are these: There are thieves and shepherds, false teachers and true,—those whose interest in the flock of God is selfish and cruel, and who need expect no following, and those whose sympathy and rightful leadership are recognized, and whose voice is sure to meet with a response.

As yet Christ has made no application of the parable. Undoubtedly by the "thief" and the "robber" he meant the

Pharisees, who professed to be the guides of the people, and were seeking to influence them to their hurt. But he left the application to be inferred. Undoubtedly by the shepherd he meant himself. But not yet was he ready to make a declaration which would mean so much. At present he left that also to be inferred. To the mind of Christ it was all plain enough. "But they understood not what things they were which he spake unto them." Their minds were attracted, but not enlightened. Into their mental confusion Christ proceeded to pour the clarifier of his advancing thought.

In the second similitude the scene is the same, but the use of it as applied by Christ to himself is changed. The contrast between the robber and the shepherd is for the moment set aside, and a new and strange contrast introduced; namely, between the robber and the door. The door is now made the prominent feature in the picture. Christ makes it a symbol of himself, which it could not have been in the previous similitude. "Verily, verily, I say unto you, I am the door of the sheep." This is not an explanation of the first parable, but a new parable, though the imagery is in part the same. The sheep are the true children of God. Christ now represents himself as the only means of entrance into the protection and blessedness of God's saving love. It is as if he had said, "I am the way, the truth, and the life." All that ever came before him, claiming to possess the keys of God's kingdom and representing themselves as the divinely authorized door, were not the door at all; they were thieves and robbers. This language does not refer to the true prophets of God, who had ever pointed to the coming Messiah. Nor does it refer to those who actually claimed to be messiahs. The language refers simply and plainly to those who by their professed knowledge of God and his law, and their relation to the theocracy as teachers and guides, claimed to

be able to determine the conditions of entrance into or exclusion from God's spiritual kingdom. This the Pharisees did with an authority that was absolute, with a wisdom that was incapable of being taught, and with a sense of sufficiency that left no need and no room for Christ. They prescribed the conditions of entrance, and made them cruel enough. They shut out not only the whole Gentile world, but the Jew that was born blind, and all who, like him, refused to bow to their authority. To them Christ said, "I am the door; by me if any man enter in," be he Jew or Gentile, shepherd or sheep, "he shall be saved." It seems probable that Christ's thought here is general, that it includes the shepherds as well as the sheep. The parable is aimed at those who professed to be shepherds and were not. Finding pasture is the duty of the shepherd. The professed shepherds themselves needed to be saved. "I am the door," said Christ, to both shepherds and sheep. All religious teachers must acknowledge Christ as the only entrance into truth and life and safety; otherwise they are not only as thieves and robbers to the flock, but they are themselves outside of the fold of God's covenanted protection. Christ may also have hinted here at that sublime truth which in a few moments he distinctly enunciated, — that the kingdom of which he was the door and the entrance, was not circumscribed by the narrow wall of the Jewish theocracy, or hemmed in by the palisade of a national exclusiveness. "If any man" is blessedly suggestive of the universality of God's offered grace and the extent of the kingdom of his dear Son. Christ is the one door of salvation, but it faces toward every quarter of the habitable globe.

Christ now reaches the climax of his parabolic discourse. What was hinted at in the first similitude is openly avowed in the third. The tenth verse is commonly looked upon as the conclusion of the second similitude; it more properly forms the introduction to the third. Christ seems to hesi-

tate before making this final, culminating declaration of his character and mission, lest the minds of his hearers should be still unprepared to receive it. It is as if he had said: I have been speaking to you of thieves and robbers, of those who care not for the flock of God but to do it harm, of false and cruel shepherds, unworthy of the name. You have not understood my meaning. But this you know, "The thief cometh not, but to steal, and to kill, and to destroy." My mission is different. "I am come that they might have life, and that they might have it abundantly." And now what I have been intimating I boldly declare: "I am the good shepherd; the good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." The "I" is emphatic, as in all this discourse.

It is difficult for us to comprehend the full force of this declaration. Christ was speaking to those to whom the shepherd-life was most familiar, who were wont to repeat in strains of significant praise, "The Lord is my shepherd; I shall not want," and to call themselves "his people, and the sheep of his pasture," and whose sacred scriptures again and again represented the coming Messiah as a shepherd, as the one divinely appointed shepherd who should seek out the scattered and lost sheep, and fold them and feed them "in a good fold and a fat pasture," "gathering the lambs in his arms and carrying them in his bosom." Alford says this was "the Messiah's best known and most loving office." So that when Christ declared, and that there might no longer be any misunderstanding, deliberately repeated the declaration, "I am the good shepherd," he announced himself as the expected Messiah, he asserted plainly his divinity, he claimed that he had come to be to the Jews and to all men the shepherd-manifestation of God. And when he added, "As the Father knoweth me and I know the Father," it was as if he called God to witness to the veracity of his assertion and the genuineness of his claim. This accounts for the effect

which the discourse had upon the hearers. It seemed to them like blasphemy which could be ascribed only to diabolical possession. The introduction of a new character, namely, the hireling, at this point in the discourse, was for the purpose, not only of asserting by contrast his love for the flock of God, but of reasserting his messiahship. He was not some one appointed and employed by the Messiah, he was himself the good shepherd, the veritable Messiah of God; and his character would be substantiated by the greatness of his love in the vicarious sacrifice of himself.

In using this figure, therefore, Christ claimed to be more than an ordinary human shepherd, however tender his interest in the flock and however great his fidelity. He claimed to be the ideal, the perfect, the divine shepherd, possessing the shepherd characteristics in their infinite excellence, illustrating to a shepherd-people their highest conceptions of the being and providence of God, and fulfilling the most cherished prophecies of their expected Messiah. And no title borne by the Son of God, among the many that set forth his character and work, has ever been dearer to the hearts of his people than this. The figure was conspicuous in early Christian art, whose rude but loving hand was wont often to trace the shepherd with his crook or with a lamb folded in his bosom; and the same figure has been the inspiration and the melody of Christian song in all the centuries.

The shepherd-title of Christ is expressive of an intimate and holy relationship, and implies certain great facts both on his part and on the part of his followers.

It implies on his part, first, ownership. Christ speaks of his followers as "*my* sheep." He is no hireling; the flock is his own. Indeed, he has a triple claim upon us, and a threefold right to call us his. We are his by creation, by preservation, and by redemption. As if the first two claims



were not enough, he adds a third, that the completeness of his ownership may be undisputed, and the genuineness of his interest undoubted. This fact lies at the basis of our religion, and its acknowledgment is an essential element of Christian faith,—the absolute sovereignty of Christ over the soul. “Ye are not your own, . . . ye are bought with a price.”

“I’m thine, O Lord, and thine alone,  
I’m thine by every tie, —  
By duty’s claims, by love’s glad choice, —  
For thee to live or die.

“There’s not an angel blest in heaven  
So bound to thee as I :  
To them thy love its gifts has given,  
For me Love’s self did die.”

Secondly, this relationship implies on the part of Christ acquaintance with his own. “I know my sheep.” He has knowledge of them personally ; he calls them by name. In the judgment of the world the separation may not be clear, but Christ knows.

“The names of all his saints he bears  
Deep graven on his heart.”

Not one of them is lost from his knowledge or care. His mark is upon them, as visible to his eye as the owner’s initial which is painted upon the flock that grazes upon a New England hillside. The shepherd of the parable misses the one sheep that is wandering, though ninety and nine are left. Christ never loses sight of the atom in the bulk, of the star in the constellation, of the individual sheep in the flock, of the single soul in the countless multitude of his disciples.

And, thirdly, this relationship implies on the part of the shepherd protection. Christ says little here about feeding the sheep ; that is taken for granted. The good shepherd will surely lead the flock into the green pastures and beside the still waters. But the whole emphasis is laid upon

the safety of the flock, and the price at which it is secured. "The good shepherd giveth his life for the sheep." "I lay down my life for the sheep." It is not certain that the doctrine of penal substitution is taught in these words. But Christ does teach the sacrificial nature of his love, that his devotion to men did not stop short of the surrender of his life, that somehow their safety and their life could be secured only at the price of his suffering and death.

On the other hand, this relationship implies on our part an affectionate confidence. The sheep know the shepherd's voice. "I know mine own, and mine own know me." The comparison of the knowledge existing between the Father and the divine Son expresses not so much the degree of knowledge as its quality. It is a knowledge based upon mutual confidence and love. The relationship is one of delightful intimacy. True faith in Christ is born in the heart. To know Christ is to love Christ. It is not enough to hear the good shepherd's voice, but we must be familiar with it. There must be a sweetness, a melody, an attractiveness about its tones, which win our recognition and kindle our emotions, just as the voice of the risen Jesus touched the heart of Mary, and lifted it above its sorrows and its fears.

This relationship also implies on our part a cheerful obedience. "The sheep follow him." When he calls, they respond. Wherever he leads, they go. Their sustenance, their comfort, their safety, their life, depend upon their ready obedience. This is the characteristic of those who are Christ's. Those who bear the name of "followers" must follow. Those who follow are followers, and those only. They follow, not their own perverse inclinations, or the unsanctified customs of society, or the dictates of false teachers and guides, but they follow Christ, his footsteps, his commandments, his spirit. This is the path of wisdom, of safety, and of eternal life.

Yes, all that follow are followers. Christ now announces the extent of his redemptive purpose, and turns his eye out over the Gentile world and down the coming ages. "Other sheep I have that are not of this fold." They are not yet gathered to the little company of my disciples, nor indeed are they included within the Jewish nation. "Them also I must bring, and they shall hear my voice," as it is caught up by my faithful witnesses and echoed in all lands in obedience to my instructions. This will be the test, not only of Christian discipleship, but of right character and of the love of truth, righteousness, and God. "Every one that is of the truth heareth my voice." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." Christ proclaims himself as the channel of God's grace to the world, the founder of the universal religion, the teacher of the absolute truth, the mediator between man and man as well as between man and God, and the unifier of the scattered members of the human family. "And they shall become one flock, [with] one shepherd." There shall not be many flocks, owned by many shepherds, in one fold, as in Christ's day, but the sheep of many folds shall be united in one flock, under the leadership and protection of the great shepherd and bishop of souls. There is here no intimation of a great visible organization which shall include all Christ's followers. The unity is a spiritual unity; it is brought about by a personal relation to Jesus Christ. Being united to him, we are thereby united to each other. Whosoever will hear his voice and follow him, shall share all the benefits of the good shepherd's infinite love and sacrifice. He is a member of Christ's one flock, and at the evening of life will be safely folded in heaven's everlasting shelter.



# THE FOURTH QUARTER.



STUDIES IN THE GOSPEL OF JOHN.

*(Concluded.)*

LESSON

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| I.    | October  | 4.  | "Christ raising Lazarus." By Rev. F. E. DEW-HURST.                           |
| II.   | "        | 11. | "Christ foretelling his Death." By Rev. EDWARD BRAISLIN, D. D.               |
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| IV.   | "        | 25. | "Christ comforting his Disciples." By Rev. President ALBION W. SMALL, Ph. D. |
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| VI.   | "        | 8.  | "The Work of the Holy Spirit." By Rev. THOMAS E. BARTLETT.                   |
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| VIII. | "        | 22. | "Christ betrayed." By Rev. Professor W. N. CLARKE, D. D.                     |
| IX.   | "        | 29. | "Christ before Pilate." By Rev. F. CLATWORTHY, D. D.                         |
| X.    | December | 6.  | "Christ crucified." By Rev. Z. GRENELL, D. D.                                |
| XI.   | "        | 13. | "Christ risen." By Rev. CHARLES A. REESE.                                    |
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Lesson I. October 4.

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CHRIST RAISING LAZARUS.

*John xi: 21-44.*

BY REV. F. E. DEWHURST, BURLINGTON, VT.

IN this house of sorrow at Bethany, unfamiliar and forgotten customs accompany the one solemn fact which no lapse of time has yet made obsolete or unfamiliar. The forms through which we express our sorrow in burying our dead have changed with the progress of years and civilization; the emotions which are aroused, the sorrow experienced, the tears which flow,—these are the familiar and perpetual elements, the touch of nature which makes the whole world kin.

Underneath the manifestations of any human life is always the human heart; and its woes and sorrows awaken responses in all other hearts that are human: for men have a kinship in pain which time and distance do not destroy. Through this kinship we may, even after this lapse of centuries, enter the chamber where the sisters of Lazarus sit, surrounded by their mourning women, and bear them a sympathy perhaps more genuine than any then felt.

Although we read the story in the light of the whole event, learning from it why Jesus delayed his coming, and although we know that his heart was full of tender solicitude toward these his stricken friends, we nevertheless respond with deep feeling to that exclamation of mingled surprise and sorrow with which first Martha, then Mary,



greet him on his arrival, — “ Lord, if thou hadst been here, my brother had not died.” It is not an expression of unbelief, it is the cry of a wounded and disappointed faith. It would be unjust to bring the confidence of these women in Jesus to the test of our own. The result, which is to us the most obvious part of the story, was not to them as yet a fact or a dreamed-of possibility. They believe that Christ, if he had been in Bethany, could have prevented their brother's death. He was not there. Even when they summoned him, he did not hasten. It was now the fourth day since the burial, and the spirit, which according to their traditions hovered about the body for three days, as if unwilling to leave it, had finally departed. The three “ days of weeping ” were over ; the seven “ days of lamentation ” were just beginning. At this stage the delaying Master appears. The utterance of mingled faith and disappointment with which these sisters greet him is one of the best evidences that they are not the mere mouthpieces of an impossible piety. There is about their behavior a humanness that we readily appreciate.

But can we discover in this story anything touching the emotions of Jesus himself? Can we get any adequate impression of what was going on in his own mind and heart amid these scenes? Does he stand as a passionless spectator of these sorrowful experiences? Does he move among the events as the mere instrument of a divine purpose, the mere worker of a sign which shall indeed have evidential value respecting himself, but no human meaning and relationship?

Nay, the incident is full of hints which bring before us a human Christ, quick in appreciation, full of sympathy, susceptible toward the varying impressions which the circumstances create. We may feel sure that in those days, between his reception of the news about Lazarus and his departure for Bethany, his sorrow was not surpassed even

by that of the sisters in their home. When he reaches them and sees their sorrow, his tears mingle with theirs. All this is genuine, vital, human. Not the least so is his shudder of indignation in spirit as he beholds the hollow and heartless lamentation of the professional mourners who throng about his friends, and as he sees the hostile glances of other Jews who have come from Jerusalem "to console them concerning their brother," who are in fact less intent upon this errand of mercy than upon plans of hostility toward himself. These things make upon us the impression that our Lord's human experience was real, genuine, spontaneously responsive to the moods of life around him.

In one respect, however, Christ's attitude in this emergency is wholly peculiar. He stands concerning the death of Lazarus at such a different point of view from the one held by these relatives and friends that, while they are disturbed and distressed, he is calm with a calmness which on the surface seems like indifference. Nor is this entirely explained by his knowledge that he will soon call Lazarus back to life. The essential relations between life and death seem somehow altered in his vision; and when he bids Lazarus awake, there is something in his manner which impresses us that what was of chief importance to the lookers-on was to the One who had brought it all about quite incidental and subordinate.

Are we right in this surmise? Did Christ have concerning life some thought so great, so comprehensive, as to make even the restoration of a dead man from the grave seem to him little and insignificant in comparison?

The answer is intimated in the narrative. Nearly every event recorded in the gospel according to John brings out some one idea which is characteristic of the gospel, — an idea for which the event, the scene, the conversation, in a sense exist as a vehicle. These ideas are *transcendental*,

as it were. They do not deal with the facts of common and outward experiences, but with realities which lie behind those experiences, condition them, and give them their deepest value. For an understanding of our Lord's history we place chief reliance on the earlier gospels. To gain insight into his deeper and subtler teachings as to the meaning of life and as to the relations where the divine and the human merge and heaven and earth commingle, we turn, not in vain, to this Fourth Gospel.

Following such a clew, where in the narrative before us shall we look for the characteristic idea? The climax of action, and to the mourners the chief event of all, is Christ's life-giving word, "Lazarus, come forth." But the climax of thought is Christ's saying to Martha, "I am the resurrection and the life." By the very singularity of the expression we should at once detect it as the characteristic, the transcendental idea. "*I am* the resurrection and the life," — we look in vain for any expression in that form outside this gospel. Here it recurs frequently: "I am the way, the truth, and the life;" "I am the bread of life, — he that cometh to me shall not hunger, and he that believeth on me shall never thirst;" "I am the vine, ye are the branches;" "I and my Father are one." These are kindred and characteristic ideas; and the striking thing about them is that they present Christ as embodying and concentrating in himself that which he is seeking to impress. He defines life and truth, not in the terms of logic or of ordinary experience, but in terms of his own personality. He does not say, I teach you these; but he says, I am these.

It is not, then, difficult to see that the assertion which Christ here makes to Martha is the culminating idea of the passage: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die." It is far

from being a mere proclamation of his power to raise Lazarus from the tomb, or to prevent other men from dying. Cancellation of the fact of physical death is not the chief sign or test of Christ's divinity. It is evidently a larger and richer thought of life which he is here setting forth, to purify and correct the commoner and lower thought. He asserts the permanence of man's existence here and hereafter; but it is a permanence proceeding from unity with himself, from the adoption of his conception of life. A man having that faith in Christ which brings with it Christ's idea of life, even if, like Lazarus, he die, yet shall he live; for he does live, and live indeed. Death has not, cannot, overcome him; he still lives on, spite of death, amid new surroundings, in the experience of a larger life; and whoever is alive and enters into that faith and that conception of life "shall never die." For such a man life and death henceforth bear changed relations and new meanings.

As we have said, this is one of the insights which are peculiar to the gospel by John. It is not an obvious idea, but deep. We are therefore not surprised that Martha, who lived wholly in the practical world of outward and sensible experience, when asked by Christ in his earnest way, "Believest thou this?" should obtusely reply, "Yea, Lord, I have believed that thou art the Christ, the Son of God, even he that cometh into the world." She believed in Christ, not doubting his power; yet her answer shows that she had not penetrated to the heart of Christ's meaning.

Poor, unspiritual, unappreciative, Martha is no worse than we. There are many uses made of these and like words of Christ which miss his real meanings in them, — meanings wherewith they were intended to enrich our lives. These very words, "I am the resurrection and the life," we too thoughtlessly write over the portals to our cemeteries and upon our tombstones. They express our faith in Christ's

power to raise the dead and to open the gates of immortality. But this is far from exhausting them. How stupidly we turn our back upon them as we come from the cemetery portal and go home to our sorrow! The most needful application of them to ourselves we thus miss. To grasp their significance would change for us the whole perspective of life and death.

Notice that it is the life-idea rather than the death-idea which is the essential and culminating thought in this deliverance of Christ. He is dealing with the incident of death, and therefore speaks of himself as the resurrection; but that thought is absorbed in the deeper and more comprehensive one of life. "I am the life," — that is the great and inclusive fact which Christ here affirms about himself. I am life; faith in me makes every possessor of it to live "He that liveth and believeth on me shall never die."

If these spiritual ideas, these transcendental truths, cannot enter into our every-day experiences, to charge them with a new vitality and to exalt them with a loftier purpose, they might as well have been left unspoken. What is our existence when unilluminated by the light of the Christ-idea of life? What does "life" mean for the multitudes of our tramping, toiling humanity? Is it not in their case, for the most part, something fitly described by the words which Christ applied to Martha at another time, — "anxious and troubled about many things"? There is a routine and tread-mill side to our probation. We have bread to get in the sweat of the brow; work is to be done by hordes of toilers from whom all joy of toil has long since departed. One aspect of our experience, the mere struggle for existence, has in it a most brutalizing element, which takes the light out of men's eyes, the courage out of their hearts, the strength out of their arms and brains. This degrading influence by no means shows itself alone in those who are defeated and

crushed by the struggle. Success often dehumanizes as truly as defeat. Men fatten on their human prey, and are hungry still. They are blinded by pleasure, triumph, and material success, and do not grow in temperance and strength. They are tested by pain, and do not advance in fortitude. Common experience has infinite pain mingled in it.

“Along the wayside where we pass bloom few  
Gay plants of heartsease, more of saddening rue;  
So life is mingled.”

Everywhere we see men living for themselves, making individual supremacy their law. They seek fame that they may be honored, knowledge that they may be learned, dominion that they may feel the sense of power, riches that they may enjoy luxury.

If this is even a partly true picture of most human experience, what sort of revelation, what added truth, needs to come into our conception of life? Do we most need assurance of immortality, of our destiny to have a being beyond the grave? We need this, to be sure; for in all our confusion and distress, some lives are characterized by such fidelity, such patience, such sacrifice and devotion, such superiority to all lower aims and pursuits, that it would mock one's belief in righteousness to see them cut off in fighting for a high standard against a low, only to have the high one at last dissolve into nothingness. For all this our need, in order to live strongly, is not a revelation of immortality so much as it is a revelation about life. What will save us is a new sense of life's value, of its quality, of its true relations, and of our power to realize these. Assurance of living forever, without some light and help upon the problem how to make life worth living at all, would mock us. The Saviour of man's life must be first of all the interpreter of its meaning; he must bring “life and immortality into light.”

It is in this way that these exalted truths taught by Jesus, which are out of sight to our unspiritual experience, come in to renew that experience. "I am the life," says Christ. Look at me, come to me; I will interpret for you the value and meaning of this human existence which I share with you, and it shall have permanence in worth and meaning according as you have faith in me and fellowship with me.

Nothing can touch our real needs closer than this teaching. Here is One who comes into our life, sharing our earthly lot, entering into all that is human in it, who nevertheless lives with motives which are divine, a spirit that is heavenly. He does not stand apart from its strife, but only from its finite aims, its petty and selfish spirit, its short-sighted and contradictory motives. His life is not less real for this, only it has a reality which conforms to infinite and eternal standards, not to those of a day. The true worth of life, genuine immortality, according to the thought of Christ, grows out of life's qualitative value and its divine standards. "If any man believe in me, he shall never die."

Do we find experimental confirmation of this prophetic utterance of Christ? Yes; from almost every source come declarations that life has acquired new value and meaning, has come out of strife into peace, out of fighting into fraternity, in proportion as Christ's conception has been realized in it. And if we seek testimony to the effect of his doctrine on individuals, what one of us who has felt drawn in any degree by the spirit of Christ has not become aware of new ideals enrapturing his soul, new motives determining his action, a divine unrest spurring him on to more and fuller life, and a consciousness of the permanence of that life which has fellowship with the spirit and ways of the Son of man?

All the dissatisfaction which we feel with the un-Christ-



like ways which have become organized into institutions bearing Christ's name, is itself the earnest of a power which shall turn and overturn, shaking the earth until the things which cannot be shaken clearly appear.

It is worth something to know that the grave is not our victor, that we do not lie down and die like brutes. But of how much more consequence is it to know that God has come to us, bringing the forces, ideals, and motives which make heaven what it is, and has revealed these to us in the life of his Son! How much better to know that life becomes really permanent and eternal by being worthful, by having in it the power and the love of God, because this is eternal life, — to know God, and Jesus Christ whom he has sent!

Christ stands before each of us, and says in spirit as he said to Martha: "I am the resurrection and the life: he that believeth on me, though he die, yet shall he live; and whosoever liveth and believeth on me shall never die. Believest thou this?"

May we not with as earnest a faith as she, and with an even larger perception of his meaning, say, Yea, Lord, I believe; help me to live thy life!

## Lesson II. October 11.

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### CHRIST FORETELLING HIS DEATH.

*John xii: 20-36.*

By REV. EDWARD BRAISLIN, D. D., BROOKLYN, N. Y.

THE multitude about our Lord was as yet in ignorance of the near approach of his death. All outward signs, indeed, pointed to a quite other destiny. The palms and hosannas of the triumphal entry into Jerusalem, the chanting by the children of familiar messianic psalms in the temple court, and the apparently popular acceptance of Jesus as king, all contributed to make this the proudest earthly hour of the Son of David. The misleading glory of that hour was all about him as a delegation of Greeks approached his disciples and asked audience of him. The manner of the strangers strikes us as having been unusually courteous and refined, and Philip, whom they addressed, seems to have suspected some extraordinary importance attaching to the embassy, for he must needs secure the approval of a fellow-apostle before venturing upon an introduction. Andrew and he together tell Jesus.

There is in the whole scene an atmosphere of official dignity and formality quite unlike the democratic freedom of intercourse usually marking our Lord's relations with the people. He himself is strangely moved. No sooner is that "Sir, we would see Jesus," reported to him by Andrew and Philip, than he exclaims, "The hour is come;" and again, "Now is my soul troubled." That these events are but related parts of

one scene is evident from the assurance of John that the words of Jesus were in "answer" to the inquirers. He who knew what was in man interpreted the nature of the desire to see him, which these wise men from the West had expressed; and in response to their need and level with their capacity, began the asked-for disclosure of himself.

What manner of men were these who could thus by their advent so powerfully affect the calm of our divine Lord, and call from him truth so profound and far-reaching? Much conjecture has been expended upon the subject, but nothing definite is known touching either their individuality or their representative character. It is certain that they were native Greeks, and probable that they were not Jewish proselytes. Their evident sincerity, courtesy, and reverence indicate intelligence and spiritual penetration. Their coming leads us to infer that they had recognized something in Jesus' reputation which prepared them for the discovery that here was One who was the Master of all their masters, — a greater than Homer, Socrates, or Plato. They were of a race distinguished above all the peoples of antiquity for intellectual and æsthetic culture, — a race mentally honest, alert, accomplished, superbly, even pathetically, human.

The Greeks, without special divine revelation, — so far as we know, — had sought and found much of the knowledge which we to-day prize in our systems of art, philosophy, even of theology. Greek processes and forms of thought have played a vital part in evolving Christian civilization. That Jesus is king was written on the cross in Greek, and to the Greek language we must still go for the entire story of his life and work. These considerations become especially interesting when we remember that the visit of the Greek delegation of which we are speaking furnishes us with the first distinct meeting-place of Greek inquiry and Christian truth, — the two factors of the world's noblest progress.

Henceforth it is to be in the union of "both Jew and Greek" that Christ is to become "the power of God and the wisdom of God."

Our scripture may then be considered as setting forth the disclosure of our Lord to the Greeks, and through them to every honest and earnest human soul asking, as they asked, to see him with clearer vision than that of the Jew, who applauded and then rejected him, or that of the Roman, who acquitted and then crucified him.

Jesus first, in direct address, discloses the fundamental truth of his personal career and his kingdom. Next is related an incident which sets before us the divinely human Lord even better than the direct address. Then the latter is resumed, made more solemn and authoritative by the interruption, while verses 34-36 reveal the meagre visible results which may attend exalted spiritual instruction, under even the most divine of teachers.

In the self-disclosure of his direct address our Lord first of all dispels the illusion which his popular reception may have occasioned in the minds of the inquirers. The hour of his glory has indeed come, but it is a glory unlike that of David and Solomon, his human ancestors. It is a glory not of this world, and yet in perfect harmony with unsinning Nature and the laws which obtain in all earthly life which is simply normal.

His glory is that of the kernel of wheat, which except it fall into the ground and die, remains solitary and fruitless, but dying, secures its glory of graceful stalk, tender green, and abundant harvest. Christ has entered Nature's domain, to submit to the laws which are regnant and beneficent there. But Nature is symbolic and prophetic; her laws are metaphors. She fulfils herself as a mute index of things beyond her. Natural law penetrates the spiritual world. Nature's Lord will fulfil Nature's prophecies, crown her laws. To him

as to her, death is essential to glorification. By death the sphere of his activity will be widened, the beauty of his character enhanced, and his likeness multiplied among men. By his death he secures an expanded horizon, a resistless momentum, a limitless companionship.

So far Christ's parable of the seed. It applies to him, but its general application by men needs his special enforcement. He knows well that it would be much more easy and agreeable to his disciples in all ages to admire him, and applaud his personal exemplification of his exquisite parable, than to follow his example. Therefore, with solemn insistence he declares the principle of life through death to be a fixed principle which no career may evade while hoping to share in what the Christ should secure beyond. Not only is the Redeemer's larger life and power secured by his self-immolation, but largeness of life and power for every man is alone so secured. Every disciple is under an awful necessity to translate the cross into life. Escape from it is never promised; but escape through it is, thank God, secured, since the Christ was more than conqueror. "Whosoever loves his life loses it," — it decays, is destroyed. He that hateth selfishness, — his false life, — shall keep his true life eternally.

"Life" in this passage is used in two senses, represented by two words. If any man will enter the sphere of usefulness, let him follow my example, and he will find me there. If any man so serve and follow, "him will my Father honor." We have here the strongest possible asseveration of the dependence of Christly companionship upon Christliness of character and conduct. Only capacity and experience furnish an arena in which the word "together" has rational meaning.

Thus with surpassing beauty and brevity does the Jesus whom the inquirers had asked to see disclose what is at once the profoundest and the simplest, the most natural and the

most mysterious, of all the New Testament teaching. He must die. His life, all spiritual life, hangs dependent upon that. He declares it as primary knowledge. It is his first word to every hungry soul. And while the child can grasp it and feel at once its necessity and its beneficence, the philosopher is but a child in the presence of its awfully glorious wisdom.

Even as Christ spoke of death and of the life which was conditioned upon it, his whole aspect suddenly changed. The personal nature of his principle seems to have grown all at once appallingly real to his human consciousness. It was he who was the kernel of wheat, and the hour was at hand when he was to pass from the light and air into the nameless horror and pain. It was he who was to lose his life, that he might keep it for himself and secure it to others. We may wonder at this revulsion of feeling, this sudden break in an infinite self-command, but it is very human. "Now is my soul troubled; and what shall I say? Father, save me from this hour: but for this cause came I unto this hour. Father, glorify thy name."

Everywhere in the suffering life of Jesus of Nazareth the sense of trouble instinctively found rest and peace in God. No trial ever came to him which did not find his face turned upward. Prayer was to him no final resort, but a first and sole refuge. It was not the prompting of a sense of duty, obeyed with divided attention, but the concentration of his soul, as normal and intense as is our instinct of self-preservation in mortal peril. When this black cloud swept over his soul, its very blackness intensified his feeling of dependence; and while it obscured his mental vision it revealed his moral and spiritual oneness with the Father.

Observe the swift and frank confession, "Now is my soul troubled;" the undisguised perplexity, "What shall I say?" the stumbling request, "Father, save me from this hour;"



the instantaneous recovery, "But for this cause came I unto this hour;" the sublime victory, "Father, glorify thy name." How unguarded, how free from artificial caution, how utterly childlike in its artlessness, is the divine revelation here made of the manhood of our great Lord! It never occurs to him, or to John, who makes the record, that so striking an exhibition of human limitation might awaken theological suspicion as to his deity. He never guards himself, — that would be fatal weakness. He simply *is*; and what he is is given away to the suspicions, the bigotries, the limitations, the stupidity, the sinfulness, of a mixed multitude of people with as much divine prodigality as his bread is given to the thousands or his life to the millions of men. As he did not guard himself, so he does not need our guarding; he simply needs that we should take him and give him away again, preach him as we find him in the word, as transparently, ingenuously, sincerely, manfully as he preached himself and as his friends reported him.

The subtle Greek, listening and observing in that crowd in the temple area, was prepared for learning, argument, subtlety; but this abandon of an utterly transparent and peerless human and divine manhood disarmed, silenced, and won him. It had affiliations with his own limitations, awakened irresistibly his aspirations, and sped away into the heaven of his loftiest dreams, — something tangible, alluring, prophetic, *possibly* attainable.

But this Jesus whom inquirers from the West would see, has swift correspondence with the skies; and this too they are permitted to behold. Physical Nature, which multiplies itself in his hands, calms itself beneath his feet, and grows luminous about his person, now vibrates with the Father's voice in his praise. That voice declares the union in one glory of the Father and the Son. It was heard audibly above the heads of the multitude. And while it disclosed



still further the regal nature and state of Jesus, it revealed the varying degrees of sensitiveness and capacity of those who stood about him. All revelation of God is a two-edged sword. It opens heaven and makes manifest the glory of God, but it uncovers also the littleness of man. The voice from the sky disclosed three orders of hearers. Some were agnostics: they heard but thunder. Some were spiritualists: they heard an angel's voice. One at least, and it may be others, heard and recognized the voice of God. So is it ever; precisely the same phenomenon is to one man purely material, to another vaguely marvellous, to another intelligently divine. To the latter class our Lord himself belongs. To him physical Nature was the Father's articulation, exquisitely modulated, clearly intelligible.

After declaring that the audible voice was not necessary to him, but that it came to reveal him more clearly to them, our Lord resumes his discourse, which his sudden sense of coming pain and the incident it occasioned, had interrupted; and what he said is reported to us in two pregnant sentences. With prophetic certainty he speaks of the triumphant results of his death as being already accomplished. "Now is the crisis of this world; now shall the ruler of this world be cast out." In the rabbinical writings "prince," or "ruler of this world," was a common designation of Satan. He was ruler of the Gentiles, as opposed to God, the ruler of the Jews. But this distinction, while it may have given currency to the phrase, "Prince of this world," was in our Lord's use of it lost in that larger distinction between those who submit to him and those who continue under the sway of evil. The prince of evil, the adversary of souls, who in fastening the Lord of Life to the cross fancied his ultimate victory secured, is in the very moment of his triumph forever overthrown by that cross itself. God makes the wrath of man and of devils to praise him. Satan's design was that

the cross should destroy the Christ and blot out forever man's hope of heaven; when, lo! it becomes instead the radiant open gateway thither. The cross forever dethrones the power which erected it.

But the living Christ is the power in the cross. In itself it is nothing. "*I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me.*" That mysterious magnetism felt by all reverent souls in the gospels which tell of his work and sacrifice; that response which the conscience unfailingly makes to his claim of kingship; that peace which invariably follows obedience to his will, — all are confirmations and illustrations of what he meant by this prophecy of pre-eminence which should be conditioned upon his death and resurrection. I say death and resurrection, for the lifting up from the earth involves the ascension from the grave and into the skies. The throne whence he draws, is at the right hand of God the Father; the power with which he draws, has been given him by his resurrection from the dead. "For if, while we were enemies, we were reconciled to God through the death of his Son, much more, being reconciled, shall we be saved by his life."

In this imperfect glance at the passage so crowded with meaning, we have simply tried to see Jesus in the light in which he obviously intended the Greek inquirers to behold him. As the discourse closed, all who had been attentive saw what no one of them had seen before in him, — new grace and glory; a grace and glory not of this world. It is difficult for us to put ourselves in their place, but impossible for us to review the scene without a new thrill of joy in having ever been introduced to him ourselves, and in having the blessed security of his living hold upon us, mightier far than that attraction which holds the stars in their courses.

And if, after we have attempted to teach others, we find that we have ranged above the intelligence or failed to pierce the

indifference of our hearers, we shall but repeat something of that experience of the Lord when, after disclosing his inmost heart to these strangers and the multitude, he is met by the very question which he has been trying to answer. "Who is this Son of Man?" is the only response he hears, to reward him for that lesson. But other days are coming; no spoken truth can die. Multitudes will read of that hour's work, and multitudes will see him in it as the Christ, the Saviour of the world. "Walk while ye have the light," "believe in the light," is his significant if not sorrowful answer to the last question. Rouse ye to the light which has penetrated your darkened understanding; follow the gleam; let it grow. "Then he departed, and did hide himself from them."

### Lesson III. October 18.

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## WASHING THE DISCIPLES' FEET.

*John xiii: 1-17.*

BY REV. LEMUEL C. BARNES, NEWTON CENTRE, MASS.

ACCURATELY to know motives is the most spiritual of knowledge ; to act on right motives the highest grace. To understand the motives of Jesus Christ and to be actuated by them is eternal life. The scripture for to-day ought to help us to "grow in the grace and knowledge of our Lord and Saviour Jesus Christ," because more than most passages it places before us the springs of his conduct. John, the disciple of deepest sympathetic insight into Christ's nature, — John, ripened by sixty years of communion with Christ, — John, of all inspired men, can best make known to us the motives from which Christ acted. Six of these are mentioned, each immeasurably powerful.

The only certain thing in the present life is that it has an end. The sublime possibilities of a human life on earth must all be realized before that certain end. A perception of the fact that the end is swiftly approaching ought to condense one's energies. Such had "Jesus, knowing that his hour was come that he should depart out of this world."

Love is that which makes life worth living. Not only is love throned in heaven, love is the main delight of home on earth. Love in the intimate circles of life, and love in its wider spheres, is the moving force of the best there is in

human conduct. The relation of heart to heart is that which stirs being to its depths. Jesus was under the mighty pressure of this thought. "Having loved his own who were in the world, he loved them unto the end," or "to the uttermost." Whether "his own" included all them also that believed on him or not, it certainly included his mother and his immediate disciples. Great and warm human love was at this moment in his heart.

A soul with a fine sense of honor is intensely aroused by the discovery of treachery. A noble nature is set on edge at the sight of meanness. Righteousness exerts itself to overcome unrighteousness. The sin of the world has called into activity the best energies of God and of good men. Chivalry springs to action in the presence of perfidy. Men can sometimes face death unmoved, or be under the sway of strong love without excitement. But where is the man who can look on the black-hearted treachery of a friend without being stirred to the depths? Jesus was under the keen spur of this emotion too, "the devil having already put into the heart of Judas Iscariot, Simon's son, to betray him."

The sense of power impels to action. The mettlesome horse must move. The child full of vitality hops and skips along with double the necessary steps. The methodical instinct, whether acting on the affairs of a nation or on the affairs of a kitchen table, must put things in order. Executive power will almost spontaneously bring things to pass. The sense of energy is the incitement to activity. What if one had the consciousness of unlimited energy! This had "Jesus, knowing that the Father had given all things into his hands."

"Blood will tell." It was a bugle-call to the children of Israel to hear repeated the names of their fathers, "Abraham, Isaac, and Jacob." Men of high lineage feel called upon to do deeds worthy of their ancestry, as well as of themselves.

Many heroic acts have been performed under that prompting. In a democratic, Christian age, any man may forget the intermediate links, and remembering that he is a child of God, rise to a godlike course of conduct. One Son of Man had, beyond all others, the consciousness of being the Son of God. He was now under the exalting and exhilarating influence of that consciousness, "knowing that he came forth from God."

There is one spring of action which lies all beyond the realm of sense. Even the ruder ages of mankind felt its force tugging at their hearts. They groped eagerly, if haply they might find its fastenings and trust themselves securely to its mighty uplift. It was brought to light by Jesus Christ. Immortality, not vaguely felt, guessed at, hoped for, but immortality revealed, demonstrated, assured, is a consummate motive, which in an incomparable way lets the pent-up possibilities of the soul break forth in deeds of power. It is worth while to move when every step is not toward an eternal grave, but toward eternal life. This assurance has "Jesus, knowing that he goeth unto God."

Here was a grand combination of spurs to action: a vivid appreciation of the shortness of this life, and at the same time of the endless life with God beyond; on the one hand a feeling of the most tenacious human love, and on the other one of recoil from the most demoniacal human treachery; the stirring consciousness of unlimited power, along with the clear perception that this power is of divine origin. The will can have no stronger incitements than these: death, love, horror of evil, consciousness of power, certainty of origin in God and of eternal life with God. Each one of them by itself has often been sufficient to awaken men to loftiest endeavor. But John tells us that these considerations were all marshalled and concentrated at once in the mind of Jesus.

On our dull souls great motives are often ineffective; but the spirit of Christ answered with electric quickness to every such incentive. From him, at a moment when he is under the impulse of many transcendent impulses combined, we can be sure of some godlike act. The creation of a new sun in the heavens would be no worthy result of such a preparation. We expect something morally much greater than that.

"He took a towel, and girded himself. Then he poureth water into the bason, and began to wash the disciples' feet, and to wipe them with the towel wherewith he was girded."

It all came to this. We saw him girded in spirit for the sublimest deed, and he simply girded himself for the act of a domestic slave. There was no servant in that company to do the necessary drudgery. The sandal-soled feet were dusty with travel, and must be cleansed before the supper. The "disciples" were still hot with their recent dispute over the question who should be greatest. At that instant not one of them was willing to do for the rest the necessary menial duty,—very much such a service as blacking boots would be now; yet Jesus did it spontaneously.

The disciples failed because under the sway of low ideas as to personal dignity. The bulk of mankind's work is composed of commonplace deeds, naturally looked upon as drudgery. Jesus brings to the tasks of humanity motives which are sublime. Wherever the impulses of heaven are introduced into the duties of earth, the kingdom of heaven has come. That was the very thing which the disciples were all the time failing to see. How they failed to see it in this case is recorded next.

Peter says, "Lord, is not this too servile an act for thee to perform on me?" Christ replies, "There is more in it than you see at first glance, Peter." "Lord, it will never, never do," insists Peter. "Reciprocating in such an



act as this, is the only way to participate in my kingdom," is Christ's response. "If there is any such magic efficacy as that in it, perform the ceremony on my hands and my head as well," Peter stupidly goes on. But Christ rejoins, "It is not a magical ceremony; it has no occult ritual efficacy; it is merely a little needful service. Having bathed this morning, the feet are the only part of the body soiled on the way here, so as to need washing now."

That is, — though not only Peter at this time, but all the apostles, as long as Christ lived on earth, failed to see it, — the kingdom of God is nothing more than the living of every-day life in a godly way. Peter's mistake is that of the ages. The kingdom of heaven is too near to be seen while men are straining their eyes for some far distant object.

Men have gone thousands of miles on pilgrimages, or hidden themselves in mountain grottos or in monastery cells; but the kingdom of heaven consists not in asceticism. Many, with closed outward eyes, have in dreamy introspection soared away into the clouds of contemplation; but the kingdom of God lies not in mysticism. Others have heated themselves to an abnormal pitch of feeling; but the kingdom of heaven is not emotion.

These far-fetched, conventional kingdoms are kingdoms of darkness and unreality. The real kingdom of God consists in doing all sorts of homely and necessary deeds in a godly or godlike way; that is, in the way Christ did them. The true teachers of religion who have helped men to see this heavenly realm have not done it with telescopes for distant vision; they have removed eye-scales, and rendered the retinas of men's eyes sensitive for the spiritual definition of that which is near to us all.

Poets, novelists, and other artists unveil the heavenly beauties of the natural world. They hold up crystal prisms which unravel for us the hues of the rainbow. So in the

moral world, genuine preachers and prophets of God reveal to us the eternal significance of every-day life. While the children of Israel were cultivating Assyrian star worship and other idolatries, the burden of the prophets was concerning the right treatment of slaves, widows, and neighbors, and the use of exact standards in trade, as God had commanded. Christ is the world's great seer, God's prophet of the kingdom of heaven at hand. The Sermon on the Mount is not a sermon in the clouds. It is as the dew of Hermon on the parched fields of every-day duty. A collection of Christ's parables might well be entitled "Spiritual Law in the Natural World." His whole life incarnates that idea. In the scene before us he does this most vividly. Whatever our opinions, our feelings, our experiences, if we fail to accept this element of Christ's doctrine, he says to each of us, "Thou hast no part with me." The necessity of participation with him in this true practice of religion, is the thought on which the remainder of the lesson insists.

Christ intends to be closely followed in this mode of life. "For I have given you an example, that ye also should do as I have done to you." His act is to be imitated, not "spiritualized." When Scripture is disagreeably exacting in its practical requirements, we have a way of turning it into allegory, and so thrusting it out of the realm of the will into that of the imagination. We delude ourselves with this pious trick by sanctimoniously calling the process "spiritualizing." It is in fact vaporizing. When a teaching comes down weightily on the conscience, it is a great relief if we can transmute it from the solid into the volatile form. When it is once evaporated, we see no end of beauty in the clouds which result.

In the ancient Orient feet-washing was as much a Christian duty as hospitality is everywhere. The early Christians so understood it. Thirty years after the event before

us, Paul instructed Timothy as to the basis of a deaconess's certificate of character in the church: "If she hath brought up children, if she hath used hospitality to strangers, if she hath washed the saints' feet, if she hath relieved the afflicted, if she hath diligently followed every good work." There is no metaphor in any of those phrases.

Neither is the act to be ceremonialized, made into a piece of ritual. This appears to have been the conclusion to which Peter jumped when the Lord insisted on the essential importance of what he had just done. That would be almost as easy a release from the disagreeable duty it imposed as the so-called "spiritualizing" process. The assumed successor of Peter has availed himself of it. The Pope once a year goes through the ceremony of washing the feet of twelve paupers, picked out for the purpose. But when did the Pope ever wash the feet of any one else, say an emperor? To others also the use of ritual at appointed times is an easy and common mode of absolving conscience from the unpleasant duties of every-day life. Christ meant to be taken literally. During the entire two generations after his death, while the New Testament was assuming the written form, there is no evidence that any one misunderstood him by supposing that his meaning was either figurative or ritual.

The act is also not to be mimicked. For men to take off boots and socks to wash one another's feet which do not need it, might be aping Christ, but would not be rendering a service; it would not be imitating him. "I have given you an example," he says. The arithmetic gives "examples for practice." For instance, "What will 675 pounds of cheese cost, at 13 cents a pound?" Probably not one of all the hundred thousand boys who work out that problem will ever have to buy or sell exactly 675 pounds of cheese at exactly 13 cents a pound; but every boy who thoroughly grasps that "exam-

ple" can multiply any number of pounds of cheese or anything else by any number of cents. The faculty of multiplication is his, because in every multiplication he imitates the processes of the original example. The example of Christ is not to be spiritualized, or ceremonialized, or mimicked; it is to be imitated.

Are we not apt to feel that the imitation of Christ is almost impossible? Does not his example often appear to us so high and difficult as to be practically beyond our reach? Is it not common to say, It is all well in theory, but it cannot be carried out in business; it is very beautiful, but it cannot be practised in society? The example of Christ is indeed difficult, there is no denying that. It is more difficult than some think, who see only the surface of Christ's character, and lightly declare that they believe in him as an example. To imitate Christ is the most difficult thing which men can do.

But the event which we are considering helps us by showing plainly just where the difficulty lies. We often fail in life because we have not learned to apply our energies at the proper point. While we vainly wrestle with unimportant elements of difficulty, the real foe, with whom we have not grappled, holds the ground.

We complain of Christ's example as too exalted. Nay, the characteristic act which he sets before us here shows that the true difficulty of it is not its loftiness, but its lowliness. Washing feet, blacking boots,—it is the thousand and one deeds of piety like these which, being required of us, stagger our faith. The extreme simplicity of Christ's example bewilders us. We look for something complicated in it, and gird ourselves for a race through a labyrinth. Our trouble in following Christ is not that the path is too intricate, but that it is too straight. The parables of Christ represent the kingdom of heaven as coming gradually.

The more it prevails, the more we find religion to prevail in the common places of life. Christ cannot be followed on stilts. How deceived are the multitudes who think of being religious as a balancing in some constrained way above the earth!

The real difficulty which we encounter in living up to Christ's example, roots itself not in our capacity but in our wills. The things required of us, instead of being those which we cannot do, are the only things and only the things, which we certainly can do. The question is, Are we willing to humble ourselves with him? "Verily, verily, I say unto you, A servant is not greater than his lord; neither one that is sent greater than he that sent him." "Ye call me Master and Lord; and ye say well; for so I am. If I, then, the Lord and Master, have washed your feet, ye also ought to wash one another's feet." "If ye know these things, happy are ye if ye do them."

## Lesson IV. October 25.

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### CHRIST COMFORTING HIS DISCIPLES.

*John xiv: 1-3, 15-27.*

BY REV. PRESIDENT ALBION W. SMALL, PH. D., WATERTVILLE, ME.

THE question which Judas asked was a natural one. It has been repeated by both sceptics and believers in every generation since. It deserves a frank reply. How can God make known himself and his ways to one man, and not to another? The Bible asserts repeatedly that he does so. "No man knoweth the Father but the Son, and he to whom the Son shall reveal him." "No man cometh unto the Father but by me." "No man hath seen God at any time; the only-begotten Son, who was in the bosom of the Father, he hath declared him." "He that loveth me shall be loved of my Father, and I will love him and will manifest myself to him,"—implying, of course, that this manifestation is exceptional, or at least not universal.

In order to understand the Master's reply, it is necessary to analyze that which the question attempted to investigate. Perhaps we should use a word which Judas, in asking it, was not sufficiently intelligent to choose. Let us say, "How may the Lord disclose or reveal himself to his disciples, and not to others?"

Disclosure, or revelation, is at least a double process. It consists in the presentation of an object of knowledge, and a mental reception of what is presented; a clear manifesta-

tion, and an object of this who is capable of apprehending it. Again, different objects of knowledge manifest or disclose themselves through diverse channels of apprehension. There is demonstration through the senses, as when we report, upon the authority of the sense of touch, that an object is hard, soft, smooth, or rough. There is also the declaration of the reason, as when we candidly consider the professions of a political party and decide upon their merits. And there is the revelation of the affections, as when we discern the bitterness of ingratitude or the sweetness of fidelity. Each kind of truth has its own channel and method of getting at the mind.

Moreover, different truths or objects manifest themselves in various degrees, according to the capacity of the recipient. Not long ago I visited one of my colleagues in his mineralogical cabinet. Opening one of the drawers, I took in my hands two specimens, with the remark, "These are duplicates." "Oh, no," was the reply, "they are quite different minerals." "How do you know that?" I said; "they look just alike." "No," was his response, "they look extremely unlike." To my sight the specimens were identical. To his critical vision, although casting the same rays of light upon his eye as upon mine, and presenting the same surface, they made an incomparably more definite revelation.

There are said to be men employed in the wine vaults connected with the London docks who are able by taste not only to distinguish between a sherry, a claret, and a port, but also to tell the district in which a given wine was produced. It is even asserted that in many cases they can name the year of the vintage.

When Grant was before Corinth, anxious to know whether the Confederates within proposed a long resistance, railroad experts in his army, placing their ears to the rails running into the city, informed the general not only that trains were



entering and leaving the city, but that the trains from the city were loaded, while those entering it were empty; thus assuring him that the besieged were trying to get away.

To each of us the share of revelation which his capacities can apprehend. Truth belonging to the sphere of one form of demonstration cannot be mediated by all, perhaps not by any, of the other forms. If your sense of sight is undeveloped, you do not demand that taste be convinced before you believe that which can only be known through the eye. You do not demand of your child an algebraic demonstration before you believe in its love. And if your affections are sensitive while your reason is slow, you do not expect arithmetic to enlist your affections before you will believe in the multiplication-table.

Men say, "Let us understand these so-called spiritual truths; let them be explained, demonstrated. Let us be convinced." The demand is fair; but the explanation, the demonstration, the conviction, must be to a capacity appropriate to this special kind of truth. These alleged truths are in the Bible. "We can read or hear it as well as others," opponents declare. "Its statements address mental capacities as active in us as in the persons who receive them. How, then, can revelation come to them rather than to us?" But assuredly words may be heard without conveying any meaning to the mind. Revelation is not complete without a reception and an understanding of the matter presented.

A truth has not been revealed to us unless we have experienced the emotions which it is fitted to arouse. Any of us may read accounts of what is seen by the astronomers who are using the Lick telescope, but only they who have gazed through that splendid glass, to resolve *nebulae* into clusters of hitherto undistinguished worlds, have known experimentally, have personally received the revelation of these hitherto unknown worlds. To one who does not possess it already,

words cannot convey experimental knowledge. They simply name our ideas. Any new knowledge which they seem to give is simply a re-arrangement of ideas previously in the mind. Looking into the kaleidoscope, you see gaudy colors. Turn the kaleidoscope: something new has apparently entered it. In fact the same light is there as before, so are the same bright pieces of glass; but they now have a different arrangement, and therefore reflect and transmit the light in a different way. Words are simply the power to turn the kaleidoscope of our experiences. If we lack the experiences, words cannot give them. For this reason, in part, no one under forty-five years of age can intelligently read Shakspeare.

All you who are parents had many times heard the words describing parental feelings before you yourselves became parents. You thought you knew their meaning; but in fact it was a totally new experience when your first helpless child was placed in your arms. All the words with which you could describe your emotions had been in your vocabulary before, but the experience filled them with a meaning undreamed of till then. In like manner, some of us often speak of "resignation to the divine will." We perhaps talk very wisely about it. Speech is not seldom the easiest for us when it concerns things of which we know the least. But we may discourse with great fluency upon a thought of this character, knowing as little about it in reality as we do of the sensations of the martyr burning at the stake.

Let us seek to apply all this to the Master's words. The Lord's manifestation becomes revelation to some and not to others, not because of differences in God, or in his manifestations, but because of differences in men. God is all about us and within. He is all the time manifesting himself. To expect that the result shall be to all of us a revelation, it is necessary to assure ourselves that we have that spiritual sense

to which the Lord alluded in his reply to Judas. There must be not only an exhibition of the divine self, there must also be the human capability of apprehending this. "Jesus answered and said unto him, *If a man love me*, he will keep my words ; and my Father will love him, and we will come unto him, and make our abode with him." The heart is not the sensitive plate upon which the manifestations of the Father can become the visible image, until it is prepared by the chemistry of love. With such preparation, the divine manifestation meets a human capacity to receive, and revelation is complete.

You read in the Bible a passage as familiar to you as the alphabet. Hitherto it has seemed to contain very little meaning, and certainly has been no mediator between you and God. Now, however, it scintillates with new meaning, and seems weighty with unsuspected value. The explanation doubtless is that since you last read it indifferently, you have encountered vicissitudes involving the same spiritual realities which the words set forth, and forcing you to exercise a sympathy with your God which you had never before developed. The formula has become a truth, and the truth has realized itself as a divine revelation.

Every high-school scholar is familiar with the experiment by which the agency of the air in the phenomena of sound is proved. A silver bell is suspended upon a spiral spring in a glass globe. The bell is kept in vibration, and its sound is at first clearly heard. But now an air-pump is set in motion beneath the globe. The impact of the bell's tiny tongue upon its sides goes on as before, yet as the air is exhausted the sound grows fainter and fainter, and at last completely dies away. The ocular manifestations are exactly as before, but the receptive medium of the air, without which sound cannot exist, is gone. In the Master's explanation, love is that medium, that condition of the heart, within which alone

the manifestations of the divine presence and of divine truth can transmute themselves into revelation.

The mysticism of this chapter is transcendent realism. The writer had seen the Lord in the body. His ear had felt the impact of the very sound-waves set in motion by the Master's voice. His hand had often pressed the Saviour's. The Lord and the disciple had clasped each other in fervent fraternal embrace. But in spite of all this, I cannot read the fourteenth and sixteenth chapters of John without claiming the prerogative of spiritual knowledge as profound and unimpeachable as that vouchsafed to the companions of the Son of God while he was in the flesh.

There is a touch more delicate than touch, a vision more penetrating than vision, a hearing more acute than hearing. Jesus Christ was not a physical but a spiritual revelation. The physical senses of hundreds of men came into relation with the manifestations of Christ's physical existence, but, for lack of that "eighth sense," of love, discovered in him no divinity.

Jesus Christ presents a body of spiritual facts adapted to human apprehension. He is not spiritual fact made discernible by physical faculty. It was not the eye of those disciples that saw God in that flesh. It was not their ear that heard God in that voice. God, by his Spirit, revealed to their loving hearts all the spiritual truth that they ever gained.

You have surely wondered sometimes, as you have read the gospels, at the invincible obtuseness of Christ's own disciples. They saw the human form, but it was phenomenally hard for them to see the divine truth and the divine spirit within the form. Jesus appeared in an age when the extraordinary was more expected than the ordinary, when the supernatural was more easily accepted than the natural; yet even his immediate disciples not only wrestled

in vain with spiritual conceptions as familiar to us as sunlight, but when they did achieve a spiritual discovery, it was by the same means which we have to use, not by any divination of the senses.

It is fortunate for our ease of spiritual apprehension that Jesus is nineteen centuries removed from the scrutiny of our senses. To the loving heart his words are to-day more resonant with divine revelation than if we heard his voice. His presence is more august with divinity than if we confronted his body. His works manifest the power of the Holy Spirit more convincingly than if they were cross-examined by our weights, measures, and crucibles. In divine telegraphy physical contact only insulates the spirit, while time and distance cannot obstruct the transmission of the message. Our spirits are not in circuit with the divine current unless we discern in the manifestations which Christ's words and work contain, the divine light, the divine wisdom, the divine gentleness, the divine fatherliness, the divine love.

I once met face to face in personal intercourse one of those masters whose bodies the tomb has claimed for more than four hundred years. I had been preparing by study, by the guidance of eminent men, by observation in various cities and numerous galleries, for exactly such an event. I had at length reached Rome, the home of Christian art. I was anxious to know if art was actually a language which I could translate. I had taken other people's hearsay and opinion and judgment long enough. I started out to see for myself whether I could find any one work of art that, without introduction or recommendation, would speak to me with power. I wandered into the Vatican, I roamed through the halls of statuary, and then among the paintings. Presently I entered a room in which were three large pieces of canvas. At two of these I cast a hurried glance, but

something in the central canvas fixed my attention. It was a picture of the Transfiguration. It was the first painting of which I could be sure that the work itself, and not its reputation, influenced me. Dozens of tourists entered the room, talked, criticised, made entries in note-books, and passed on, while I was detained by an invisible power. For an hour I was learning from that painter the glories of the Transfiguration Mount. All else in the picture was lifeless; but the face of the Christ, shining as the sun, radiant with the nearly completed triumph of a finished redemption, resplendent with "beatitude past utterance," profoundly moved me. The tears started unbidden; the heart beat faster. The same awe seemed to bow me which prostrated the witnessing disciples.

Then I turned away to learn who it was that had so moved my heart. I found that I had been in converse with Raphael. I had met him in the midst of his last earthly work, while he was hastening to leave his supreme thought with the world before death overtook him. With his vision of the transfigured Christ he had taught me for an hour as eloquently as he had ever thrilled disciples who knew him in the body.

Shall I ever again go to another's opinion, or to a printed book, or to an æsthetic dogma, to learn whether Raphael is a power, whether Raphael is great, whether Raphael is a master? I know it for myself; I have seen it and felt it. He grasped me, lifted me, swayed me.

The whole life of Christ, as written in the Scriptures, is the Holy Spirit's canvas. If we go to it sympathetically, the Spirit of God will glorify himself in us. He will cause us to see and feel and know the facts of spiritual life. It is our right to have just as authentic evidence that the grace of God changes the heart, as stands in the records of the apostles. It is given us to have a spiritual insight for

ourselves, and to be able to testify, not that there is an old chronicle which reports that a Pharisee of Tarsus was spiritually blind and somehow gained spiritual eyesight, but to testify that we were blind, yet now see. It is our privilege to know that the spirit of Christ is the vital power of our spiritual nature, and from immediate knowledge to testify of its operation. There is no necessity laid upon us to be satisfied with repeating what Christ has said will prove true. It is ours to experience the truth and to preach Christ from personal verification. Then we may rightfully assert with John in his years of ripe Christian experience, "that which we have heard, that which we have seen with our eyes, that which we beheld and our hands handled concerning the Word of life, . . . declare we."



## Lesson V. November 1.

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### CHRIST THE TRUE VINE.

*John xv: 1-16.*

BY REV. C. C. BROWN, SUMTER, S. C.

THIS was the last of our Lord's parables. Whether he delivered it on the way to Olivet, whose vineyards that night were lighted with watchfires, or standing near the temple gate, which was decorated with a golden vine, or in the guest-chamber, whither a vine may have crept through the window, are questions that cannot be settled, and the wisest opinions upon them are but guesses.

The parable is big with meaning, and may be used to illustrate a good many things which it was not designed to teach. It contains three great and essential ideas, which we may condense as follows: Incorporated into Christ; abiding in Christ; bearing fruit in Christ. Let us consider these thoughts in their order.

1. Christians are represented as incorporated into Christ and made a part of him. He is the vine, the stock and stem, and they are the branches. Thus are they of the same body, and the Christian draws his life from Christ. Apart from him, severed from him, even strength is weakness. Mark you, he did not say, Apart from my church, or Apart from my doctrines, but, Apart from me. There is a union that is closer than any that comes through simple adherence to church or creed. It is to this that our Lord refers; it is this, too, about which so many fatal mistakes are made.

The Christian and the Christ are one, just as the vine and its branches are one. It is painful to know that there are so many teachers and people—yea, whole denominations—who have utterly failed to lay hold of this fundamental truth, and who teach a union with Christ that is purely artificial and unreal,—a union resulting from rite and ritual, from some priestly touch or superstitious manipulation. The real power of Christ will never flow through his people to bless the world until all that are named as his shall draw their life from him directly and immediately. So-called spiritual energy that has its origin elsewhere than in him is only like the moving of an electrified corpse, or the ambling of a mechanical hobby-horse. If any man would know the power of Christ over him, he must feel the flow of the life of Christ in him. There is now no spiritual Israel except the human beings who grow out of Christ as the branch out of the vine. These, since the Jews have been cut off, or, as Paul puts it, have fallen off by unbelief, constitute God's spiritual children; and there are no others, except in the sense that God is the willing Father of all whom he creates and preserves.

The connection is neither nominal nor artificial, it is a living union. The life of our Lord is imparted to us every day. Because he lives, we are to live also. The life that he imparts is not circumscribed and limited by the narrow boundaries of time, but takes hold upon the everlasting. If the world objects, and tells us that such a doctrine—a doctrine linking his life with ours, and ours with his—is dishonoring to him, we can reply, "Jesus knew the faults of his disciples before he called them, and told them that their life was a part of his." Verily it was true in every sense, "Ye did not choose me, but I chose you." He saw their ignorance and slowness of heart, the narrowness and, often, the unworthiness of their motives; and in the face of all

this he declared that they were members of him, branches of the Vine of God. Nor does he know less of those whom he chooses in this day and time, who are made partakers of his life.

2. Christians must abide in Christ.

In the fourth verse of this chapter we have an earnest exhortation, a plea, an entreaty, — “Abide in me.” As your life is in me, so let your living be. In verse 9 this exhortation is intensified, “Abide ye in my love.” This is not now a call to service, but to friendship and affection. He means to say, “Love me, and let me love you. I seek only your peace and your good.” What infinite condescension; how great a part of his life his disciples must have been; how much of his life they now are!

Then follows a wholesome warning, “If a man abide not in me, he is cast forth as a branch, and is withered.” The severed branch not only dies but is removed; and the churches of Christ must learn the lesson that is here taught. As dead branches disfigure the vine, so do dead branches disfigure Christ and his Church. It is better for a bramble to be in the wilderness than in the orchard, for a weed to be in the forest than in the field. If a man will not abide in Christ, and so withers away, it is better for him, for the Church, and for the world, that he be cast forth. To number him among God’s people, and assign him a place of honor in the Church, where every place is honorable and fit for kings and princes, is only openly to oppose the scripture and to do high-handed violence to the commandments of God.

Next is added a sure promise: “If ye abide in me, and my words abide in you, ask whatsoever ye will, and it shall be done unto you.” This is the secret key that unlocks the gates of prayer, admitting one to the very feet of God. We are not given a long problem to solve, or a mystical enigma

to be guessed at, but are told, in simplest utterance and in surest promise, how to win God's audience and his favor. The whole world is full of beggars, and all the air is heavy with the cries of them who seem to call on God in vain. They have but to return to the first principles of spiritual life, and learn from Jesus this simple lesson, — a lesson that eager hearts would so easily learn, — "Abide in me, and let my words abide in you; so shall the heavens be opened to you, and all the skies be thronged with answered prayers."

After this comes a rule that is both an argument and an exhortation, "If ye keep my commandments, ye shall abide in my love."

This is a summing up of the lessons in the parable. By keeping our Lord's commandments we shall know the joy of abiding in his love. The union between us can never be dissolved so long as we are faithful in this one thing. No man ever withered and fell off from Christ while his heart earnestly sought to do Christ's will.

But some one may say, "All this about abiding in Christ is a far-away, unreal notion; it belongs to the mystic and the vain dreamer." But behold, there is given in these words a simple rule which will verify itself. To abide in Christ's commandments is to abide in his love. The love of the heart which leads to obedience, is the sure door to the love of Christ which is the reward of obedience. "Yea," says he, "I have verified the rule I give you; for I have kept my Father's commandments, and I abide in his love."

Further still, "By doing my commandments, ye shall prove your friendship for me." And this is the proof which a waiting world demands, — not loud talking and mighty display, but a quiet doing of the will of Jesus. This speaks louder than any other utterance, and men discover in this way sooner than in any other that we came from Christ as Christ came from God.

### 3. We are to bear fruit in Christ.

A vine is valuable only for its fruit, the wood being of but little use.

The essential glory of the human Christ was not in his poor mortal body, but in his fruitfulness. The law that he complied with, he would bind also upon us.

If we bear much fruit, we shall glorify God and prove our discipleship. In the fruitfulness of the vine is the glory of the husbandman, and in the fruitfulness of the branch is the believer's reward; for as faith leads to faith, and love to love, and light to light, so discipleship leads to discipleship. And true discipleship, says Bengel, is the basis and foundation of Christianity.

"On earth the vine reveals itself in the branches, and is also concealed in them." It effects nothing but by the branches, and if the churches grow weary of the never-ending calls, and complain that the progress of spiritual life and truth is slow among men, we can find the reason and explanation here, — the branches fail to appropriate and utilize the life of the vine. True discipleship will fill all the world with joy and with disciples.

But, as the highest wisdom and good sense would direct, we lose our place in Christ if we bear no fruit. "Every branch in me that beareth not fruit, he taketh away." This is the work of the husbandman, who is God, to whom the vineyard belongs; God being here represented not simply as the vine-dresser, but also as the owner of the land.

Then it is possible, if the meaning of this parable was intended to go so far, to come into organic relation with the True Vine, to be in it, to be a part of it, but to bring forth no fruit, and so to be cut off. In order to force these words into accordance with the doctrine that once in Christ, we are in Christ forever, good and wise men have adopted theories that are passing strange. One says that these cut-off branches

were never really a part of the vine, but only shoots, with little or no life, and no fruit-bearing power. Another declares that the whole idea refers to nations, customs, institutions, and the like, which, failing to come up to Christ's requirements, would be cut off as the Jews were. This may be a general truth; but in verse v. the words are intensely personal, "he that abideth in me, and I in him, the same beareth much fruit." If words can convey any sense at all, not a people, a custom, or an institution is here meant, but surely a man.

Meyer teaches that those cut off are only lip-Christians, who say, Lord, Lord; and these God separates from the fellowship of Christ. But how can they be separated if they were never united? It seems to me that it is a more wholesome doctrine for us to teach that if a believer—yea, an apostle or an angel—severs himself from Christ, and seeks to live upon his past reputation or upon his imagined strength, upon the clearness of his intellect or the eminence of his position, he will prove to himself and to the world the truth of Christ's words, "Apart from me ye can do nothing." And so this useless thing, that neither honors God nor blesses man, will soon lie withered and dead among the branches that have been taken away.

"He taketh it away." These words are solemn and awful. How far do they reach? To how many do they apply? May there not be some communing in our churches, walking amidst the congregation of worshippers, whom God has cut off because of a fruitless life? It must be so. It cannot be that all the idlers, the covetous, the complainers, are growing yet in the Vine as true and real branches. Christ's life and vigor in them would compel fruitage. There are multitudes who, as the years go by, grow more and more useless; whose lives seem to dwindle into narrowness, and whose hearts lose all responsiveness to the word and

voice of God. I have read of a stream flowing from the mountains, fresh and strong, and rolling out into the desert, growing smaller as it flows, only to be lost at last among the thirsty sands that absorb and drink it up. Such are some human lives, and these are surely they whom God "taketh away."

And not only taken away are they, but cast forth and burned. We need not refer this fire to the consequences of the Last Judgment. There are other fires that kindle and burn. If a man turn away from Christ, his way to ruin is open. All the restraints that once held him being removed, he often takes the bit in his teeth, and rushes to quick and remediless ruin. Then comes the fire, — yea, a thousand hissing flames of new temptations, and aggravated sins, and multiplying sorrows. We should not have to go far to find more than one, who, having once had a good and honorable place among God's people, is now lying outside in the torment of unrest and sorrow, looking back with infinite yearning upon what used to be. "The face not always shows what's in the heart." Too many, alas! daily realize that their life is virtually useless, — a long struggle for bread, and then a forgotten grave. They see that their place in the world is a very small one, that their impress upon men for good amounts to nothing, and they know, from observation and experience, if they know anything at all, that all this comes from living apart from Christ, cut off, and fit only for the fire of a continually renewed torment. And what fire burns with keener torture than such a remorse!

One more process is suggested to us. The husbandman prunes the vines. He checks their luxuriance to stimulate their fruiting. "God would rather see his vines bleed than see them barren."

This pruning is a painful process, but leads to enlarged usefulness. I have seen the pruning-knife at work in the



Father's hand. It was a hand of love that held it, and the hand was restrained by a heart of love; but the wholesome work went on. In one case health was cut off; in another, wealth. In this home, black-visaged Sorrow sat, and in that heart a deep grave was dug. Over there it was an empty cradle, and just around the corner they told a story about a boy that had gone away from home. All the earth was darkened, and light came only from heaven. Hence it was that those who stood in gloom were found looking upwards to the light, and moving lips sent silent prayers to God. O, no, we must not think that the Husbandman is cruel, and lops off branches that ought to remain, or that he delights in seeing the bleeding and tearing of the branches. More fruit is what he seeks. The branches that are too luxuriant may all go to leaf and bud. Not often are believers swept away from God by multiplied sorrows. Rather do these drive them to the cross. Prosperity has whelmed more souls in ruin than adversity. A life that is too full of ease is a home for vain confidence and pride. Those only are safe who, having learned the lessons of God, lay hold of heaven, and let the poor, treacherous world roll on beneath them.

## Lesson VI. November 8.

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### THE WORK OF THE HOLY SPIRIT.

*John xvi: 1-15.*

BY REV. THOMAS E. BARTLETT, PROVIDENCE, R. I.

SOME statements of Scripture are much more difficult to accept than others. Either there is in them an element which baffles a full understanding, or they seem at variance with accepted doctrines. The doctrine of the Holy Spirit has its difficulties. It contains a mysterious element. But we have the King of Truth as our teacher, and can study this truth in the very setting which he gave it.

We consider, first, Christ's estimate of the Spirit's ministry in his disciples. Jesus gave to certain of his sayings a special emphasis. Sometimes he said, "I say unto you;" sometimes, "Verily, verily, I say unto you." Twice he said, "I tell you of a truth." Once he introduced a saying with words which seem strange on such lips, — "I tell you the truth;" and this strong assertion of the trustworthiness of his words was given as he approached a fresh announcement of the coming of the Spirit. Doubt must be held in check, that the words may not be spoken in vain. "Nevertheless I tell you the truth, it is expedient for you that I go away." For the disciples' advantage that the Master should leave them in the world exposed to peril, that their Leader fall before the enemy at the beginning of his career, and that they be left to work without him! How could it be? To meet every rising doubt and to give unusual emphasis to a state-

ment certain to be questioned, Jesus condescended to say, "Nevertheless I tell you the truth."

No one will think that this special assurance was not needed, or say that this solemn introduction is too weighty for the utterance which follows it. The certification is necessary even yet. There are many still who do not understand that Christ's removal from the sight of men was best for the world and best for Christians. Every regret that Christ's hands cannot now be touched, that his face cannot be seen, that his voice does not still give audible answers to our questions, is evidence of the practical rejection of this saying: "It is expedient for you that I go away." This assertion is unconsciously questioned in another way. The longing for Christ's visible return, as though this would be the cure of present ills, questions it. There are some who can call the Church a widow, though Jesus said, "I am with you all the days." Disheartened by the delay of the earth's regeneration, many look for a new and better agency to hasten it. They suppose that when Jesus shall do what he refused to do on earth, when he shall descend in celestial glory from the high place of his permanent transfiguration, this new agency will outdo the preaching of the truth by men and the accompanying ministry of the Spirit of God. If it would, why is that return delayed for an hour? This is only a crying out for Christ's visible presence, as though he had not said, "It is expedient for you that I go away."

But if even now this saying needs emphasis and repetition to overcome the natural longing for the visible form, how needful were Christ's words at the first, when the departure wore the garb of calamity only, and men had not seen a single advantage in Christ's withdrawal from human sight. Let us put ourselves in thought with the apostles on the evening before the crucifixion. What appears to be a dark calamity is now plainly seen. Jesus speaks of the intense

hatred of the world against himself. He gives no quieting description of the storm about to burst upon him and then upon his apostles. We can understand that it was expedient for Christ to escape from the rage of a hostile world and return to the bright home he had left. We understand his words, "If ye loved me, ye would rejoice because I said; I go unto the Father;" but the apostles are to be left to face the wolves and to endure for years the distresses of persecution. They were to be treated as wicked men. So high would the rage against them rise, men would come to think that killing them was rendering acceptable service to God. "Nevertheless," said Jesus, "it is expedient for you that I go away."

Two great afflictions for the apostles were involved in the Master's departure. First, they were to part with him who had invited their trust and richly rewarded it, who had stood between them and peril, and had awakened in their souls the desire to be with him forever. Secondly, the removal of the Master was to be the signal for persecution. The apostles would soon be the target for the arrows of death. Martyrdom, swift and sharp, or lingering and slow, awaited them. We must not even attempt to make these afflictions seem small. It was a loss to have Jesus taken away. It was an affliction to have human hate, fanned to fury, enclose them; and yet Jesus said there was gain for the disciples in his going away.

How is the loss to be made good? How shall violent persecution be offset? What gift can compensate for the absence of Christ and the on-rush of the nation's wrath? What supernatural legacy will be able, not only to neutralize losses and pains so great, but to leave those who are to suffer such sorrows better off than they were before the distresses came? Christ has such a gift in reserve. He alone measured the value of the endowment soon to come to his

Church. When he shall name it, it will seem an unsubstantial gift. It is the gift of the Spirit. A special bestowment of the Spirit of God is promised, of that Spirit who is called the Spirit of truth, and the Comforter, or Helper, of the Church. Learn Christ's estimate of this gift, and make that measure your own. The promise of the Spirit's coming is the very heart of Christ's farewell address. It finds a place in the fourteenth, the fifteenth, and the sixteenth chapters of the Fourth Gospel. It is evident that Jesus had in mind for himself and his disciples a strong consolation. To this priceless address we turn for words which touch the heights and the depths of comfort. What is the teaching in this farewell discourse which is most prominent by position, repetition and fulness of statement? It is this: there is a gift in reserve; grace has one more reliance; the Spirit of truth will come.

What glowing anticipation of the Spirit's day! What serenity of heart was Christ's, in view of this last reliance of grace which would make truth clear to the disciples and to the world! In fifty days the promise was fulfilled. Then doubt, timidity, weakness, fled from the apostles' hearts, and the victories of the truth were multiplied. Under the same ministry we are passing our lives. To the Spirit it is due that Christians are conscious of Christ's presence, that Christ, raised now above the limitations of a localized existence, the dream of a kingdom of force proved vain, can be with his people always, in every part of the world.

But will the Spirit be a helper only in the hearts of Christians? They needed help in another quarter. They were to press their message upon the acceptance of men unfriendly to it. What if in their evangelizing they should be helped by an ally who could work upon even hostile hearts? Such was our Lord's announcement, and with what evident precision and exactness the words fell! "When

he is come, he will convince the world of sin, and of righteousness, and of judgment: of sin, because they believe not on me; of righteousness, because I go unto my Father and ye see me no more; of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged."

Consider next, then, Christ's outline of the Spirit's work upon the world.

No earnest mind can be satisfied with any superficial treatment of these words. Reverence for Christ impels us to seek a profound meaning, and yet one which the words were evidently intended to convey. We were not told these things about the Holy Spirit to mystify us. The Spirit's work has been brought within reach of earnest study. In the midst of a summer shower a tree by the road-side is torn by the lightning. You may know little of the nature of electricity, or of the laws which govern its action; but the effect of the lightning you can examine at your leisure. There, before you, is one of its manifestations. So Jesus directed our thought to the work which would manifest the invisible and mysterious Spirit. His work will be upon the minds and hearts of men. He will bring men to see truth as they never saw it before. He will produce such a sense of sin that there shall be no doubt in men's minds of their guilt before God. He will make them certain that righteousness is not a mere name or a dream, but something real. He will bring a conviction of the certainty of judgment, giving assurance that sin will not be suffered to lift itself up forever. Men shall be certified of the reality of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment, so that when they venture to deny any one of these, they will hear a voice within themselves rebuking their denial.

If Jesus had said no more, we should have had a precious truth. That men may accept the message from God, they must be in a measure conscious of their woe. They need

to see that between sin and righteousness there is a vast gulf, and that sin will not escape judgment; and the Spirit, Christ declares, will produce these convictions. But to his promise that the Spirit will "convince the world," the Saviour adds something: he tells us what means the Spirit will use. He will not employ the agencies of another world, as the ministry of angels; he will not work directly by visions or dreams. He will use means which men can help supply, so that we can see how our work and the Spirit's work may be joined together. He will convince, disciples must preach. He will use these truths, which Christian preaching must supply: "They believe not on me; I go unto my Father; the prince of this world hath been judged." Other truths may be dark, but not these. These must be such as even unbelievers can understand. They cannot themselves need proof, they are to be used to press home other truths. Men while still rejecting Christ,—the world of unbelievers, are to be convinced of sin because they believe not on Christ; of righteousness, because Christ goes to his Father; of judgment, because the prince of this world has been judged. With this in mind, we must not put upon these expressions any obscure meaning.

The first is plain: the Spirit will bring conviction of sin because men believe not on Christ. The thing to be pressed home is human sinfulness; the means to be used in doing this is man's rejection of Christ. But what is the process? Let the character of Jesus as portrayed in the gospels be set before men; let his words and deeds, his blended lowliness and majesty, let all be told,—the high claims he made, the proofs he furnished in superhuman words and works; and men will not discover one stain upon that life. Disclose, then, fully, the treatment men gave this spotless Being: that there was no outburst of love toward him, as there must have been in a sinless world; that there was coldness,



criticism, suspicion, hostility, and at last wrath so malignant and furious that men laid violent hands upon the Just One, hurried him to the death of a criminal, and gave him insolence in his dying hours. In that passionate enmity to the Sinless One, the human heart disclosed its real attitude toward God. The clearest revelation of God's character had been given, and human nature did not bow down before it, but, as though muttering in a horrid undertone the words of Milton's Satan to the sun, "Oh, how I hate thy beams!" men rose in wrath and thrust Christ away.

But this was in a far-off age. Is this, then, too dark a picture of human nature in our day? Men do not now have the opportunity to lay hostile hands on Christ, but they look upon the revelation of his perfect character, they recognize his goodness, and have the heart to stand aloof from him. What if the modern unbeliever had been in Pilate's place, or had stood with the priests or the soldiers: would he have braved the passion of the hour and stood forth a saint? Knowing the cowardice and the low selfishness of which human hearts on occasion are capable, dare any of us declare that we should have shown heroism as defenders of the insulted Christ? Less trying scenes have proved but too plainly what our strength is. Because we have hearts capable of rejecting Christ, because we have turned to him the look of unbelief, we are convinced of our sinfulness. We have looked upon the glories of a heavenly sunrise, and the beauty has not won our love; we have seen the very embodiment of our own ideals, and we have been willing to turn away; and the Spirit makes this discovery of ourselves to fasten the conviction of our sin upon us.

The second part of the Spirit's work may seem less clear. We are told that he will produce in the world a conviction of righteousness, because Christ goes to the Father and is seen no more. Righteousness is to be brought to light, and

the means of doing this is the manifest going of Christ to the Father and becoming invisible. We are convinced of the existence of some exceptional virtue by seeing an example of it. How could men be made to believe in the reality of righteousness but by seeing an embodiment of it? Among men righteousness is, at best, stained and dim. The vision of perfect righteousness had vanished from the earth, but that vanished vision was restored in Christ. Perfection was here for years in a living Person before the gaze of men; but men did not at first know that they were looking upon sinlessness and perfect righteousness. They must be made to see this. Unbelief itself must be convinced that Christ was a righteous being. How and when? By his sufferings, by his divine bearing when facing death, and especially by reflection upon his life, illumined by his death, after he was gone. In this we cannot be mistaken, said Jesus, when about to go forth to death, and in full view of the cross, "That the world may know that I love the Father . . . so I do. Arise, let us go." And the world did learn, in the bearing of Jesus in his last sufferings, that he was righteous. The trial was his vindication, before conscience, of every charge. The crucifixion was the exhibition of his divine virtue. "I go to my Father:" the words point to the dying Christ. With these words Jesus spoke of his dying in all his farewell address. The dying scene, not the ascension, was made conspicuous before the world. The crucifixion took place amid surging multitudes, at a time when Jerusalem was overfilled with pilgrims. The sufferer's name and title were made known in three languages. Attention was further arrested by the supernatural darkness at noonday. And now there are for the world four full accounts of that going to the Father. Ponder, nay, read with seriousness, the simple recital of the events of that day, and you will at least be convinced that Christ was not a malefactor, you

will readily adopt as your own the centurion's confession, "Truly this was a righteous man."

The Spirit will bring conviction "of judgment, because the prince of this world hath been judged." This judgment of the world's prince must be something which the world can know. It is to have the influence of a test-case in court,—the certainty that judgment will elsewhere be produced by it. "The prince of this world cometh," said Christ as he looked forward to Calvary. We, too, will look that way to see him. We see wickedness working its will unhindered. Did not sin in Caiaphas, in the rulers, in Pilate, in the soldiers, in the multitude, uncoil itself as if by an irresistible compulsion, and at last exhibit its whole terrible length? The prince of this world was unseen; but does conscience need much proof that he was there? On the cross was spotless innocence, around it raged a pitiless enmity; on the cross was measureless love, around it surged a sea of fiendish hate. If Satan had been visible, he could have added nothing to that exhibition of sin. We say sin was exposed on that day,— "judged," said Christ; "the prince of this world has been judged:" not punished, but exposed and condemned, judged as the prisoner in court is judged when he is proved guilty and sentenced as a criminal, even before the hand of law takes him from the bar. Conscience, though clouded by sin, sees this towering manifestation of sin, and condemns it in haste; and conscience enlightened, we know not how much, by the Spirit of God, tells us that its own judgment is but the diminished echo of the sentence on high.

O, the depths of wisdom, and wisdom not of this world, disclosed at the cross of Christ, that, looking thither, the heart of man can be convinced of sin, of righteousness, and of judgment! The Spirit has not wrought in vain. He has given us in their present form the narratives of Christ; he hovers over us when we ponder the fourfold story. He does

his work in every heart that is made to look intently upon the suffering Lamb of God. Already the conviction of sin is wide spread. Where Christ is preached, there is abroad a full recognition of his righteousness. There is now among us a general belief that sin stands condemned, and is in danger of the doom it deserves. And this is the result of the preaching of Christ crucified, and of the Spirit's influence upon even the unbelieving. All this is true of many around us. They are convinced, but not subdued; they have not only been brought to hear the Gospel, they have been made the objects of the Spirit's solicitude: and still they delay; but no new gospel can be given, and no mightier spirit can come.

“ No more let sin deceive,  
Nor earthly cares betray.  
Oh, let us never, never grieve  
The Comforter away ! ”

Lesson VII. November 15.

CHRIST'S PRAYER FOR HIS DISCIPLES.

*John xii: 1-19.*

\* BY REV. JOHN R. GOW, BRIDGEPORT, CONN.

THIS wonderful prayer of Jesus, the first two sections of which form our lesson to-day, besets the expository preacher with many difficulties. Chief among them is its bewildering richness of suggestion and material for thought. The explanation of the text in its details must therefore be left to the commentators. Nor is the task which remains an easy one; namely, to bring to light the inner unity of the prayer, and to group its abundance in sufficiently logical order to secure the definite impression which should follow even an expository sermon.

The words, "I pray," call attention to the main petition, "Keep them, guard them diligently as prisoners of thy grace;" "not that thou shouldst take them from the world, but that thou shouldst keep them from the Evil One."

Many reasons determined Jesus to pray thus for the disciples at this time. He was standing at the end of his earthly mission. For him to go away was to leave the sheep without a shepherd, — to be scattered, unprotected, helpless. Joy might, to be sure, even then come to them out of his words. By and by it should be completed in them. But his kingdom and the salvation of their fellow-men forbade removing them at once from contact with the world. He had indeed taken them out of its thoughts and sympathies,

but in so doing he had stirred up against them the bitter opposition of ungodly men. Besides this, he had even sent them out to proclaim the message of truth, just as the Father had sent him. They could expect no better treatment than he was receiving. All the forces of evil would be speedily arrayed against them in violent attack. Good need that they be protected, when the ordinary assaults of wickedness were too much for their fellows! Moreover, the Lord's own glory was to be intrusted to these disciples. The future of his mission of redemption lay with them. Their victory was to be his victory, their defeat would be his defeat. For themselves and for his work as well, the temporary protection which they had received from Jesus' bodily presence must be superseded by the eternal and spiritual protection of the Holy Father. And so in wise forethought and tenderest love he prays, "Holy Father, keep them."

What reasons existed for such a prayer which are not as powerful to-day? Who does not need the Father's keeping, as did the apostles? Are we not weak and easily bewildered? Do we not go astray?

"Are there no foes for me to face?  
Must I not stem the flood?  
Is this vile world a friend to grace,  
To help me on to God?"

Or has the Master ceased to love his humble followers, or changed in his gracious purposes toward them? Who, then, shall deny us the comfort of believing that this prayer is verily the constant request of our Master for his beloved, even until the assaults of the Adversary are at an end?

But this prayer points out where and how they are to be kept, as well as from what they are to be kept. The request reads, according to the best accredited text, "Keep them in thy name which thou hast given me." As to an enchanted ground whereon no evil thing may find a footing,

the Master remands the disciples to the realm of life suggested by the Christ-borne "name" of God. Jesus, "he who saves," and Immanuel, "God with us," were the names which the angels gave to the child of Bethlehem. "The Son of the living God" was the name that fell from Peter's lips, and won the benediction, "Blessed art thou, Simon Bar-Jona; for flesh and blood hath not revealed it unto thee, but my Father which is in heaven." "My beloved Son," said the "Voice out of the cloud" on the Mount of Transfiguration. "And his name is called The Word of God," writes the Apocalyptic seer, "and he hath . . . a name written, King of kings and Lord of lords." "Wherefore also God highly exalted him, . . . and gave unto him the name which is above every name; that in the name of Jesus every knee should bow of things in heaven and things on earth, and that every tongue should confess that Jesus is Lord, to the glory of God the Father."

With such copious revelations as reside in these divine names given to Jesus, the lives of the disciples were to be filled to the exclusion of all else. No suggestion of evil could approach them, occupied with thoughts of his wonderful majesty and redeeming grace. There would be no room in them for other loves, possessed as they would be by admiring gratitude for him who loved them while they were yet sinners. There would be no chance for mischief to defile their hands, busy in serving him.

This was familiar ground for the disciples. Already Jesus had been keeping them in this way. At first, without knowing him as God's Son, they had been constrained to better living by acquaintance with his character. Little by little, he had preoccupied their hearts with holier affections. The ministries of his Gospel, too, had crowded out their grosser purposes and shameful ambitions. Especially had the Evil One been less able to lead them astray in the paths of a false



religiousness, since they had learned the loving character of their heavenly Father and the direct approaches to him illustrated by Jesus in his daily worship.

Obviously there is in such protection nothing of that magical element which even the best of Christians are in danger of importing into their thought about God's keeping of his own. The providential care of our heavenly Father is a blessed fact in the experience of his beloved, not to be overthrown by any spirit of rationalism; yet the student of this prayer cannot but feel that the wonder of moral transformation under the power of spiritual truth is the only interposition that is proposed. Nor is it safe to esteem lightly the defence against evil which lies in a consecrated daily life. Missionary biography at home and abroad is full of startling testimony to it. Indeed, this limiting of the way in which God shall keep us is, after all, not a limiting, but a lifting of the whole matter out of the realm where "the world, the flesh, and the devil" are strong, into the spiritual realm, where they are waging a losing, though hotly contested, battle. Who of us, then, would wish to carry on the fight on other ground? Or who would ask God to keep him from the Evil One, while he is unwilling to commit himself to the divine method of protection? Let us, then, beloved, open wide the citadels of life to the mighty forces of God's glorious redemption. "And the peace of God, which passeth all understanding, shall guard your hearts and your thoughts in Christ Jesus."

Though it was in respect to only a little company, it was no little thing for Jesus to be able at last to say, "I manifested thy name to the men whom thou gavest me out of the world; . . . and they knew of a truth that I came forth from thee, and they believed that thou didst send me." The one great need of the world is knowledge of the being and character of God. The story of pagan nations bears ample

witness to the moulding power of religious ideals. Israel's progress in moral integrity and religious purity was due to new and better conceptions of the God of Israel. A true theology is not the sign so much as the efficient cause of higher civilization and a more spiritual faith. The cry of an awakened Church, "Let us evangelize the multitude," is false to history unless it is born of a deeper cry, "Let us show God as he is." The Christian centuries are the product of a knowledge of God imparted to eleven men. It may be pleasant to our ambition and our pride to be the centres of large companies of professed Christians; but the divine method for us may perchance be followed better, and the results be grander after all, if we are content to seek quality rather than quantity. There is a spiritual evolution of ideas which depends on intensity of impression. The very importance of our message increases the burden on us to reveal the character and purposes of God our Saviour just as perfectly as we can, whether to few or to many.

We must remember that this prayer identifies the knowledge of God with the eternal life. It declares that the mission of Jesus was to give eternal life to the world. But this does not mean that he came to open up or confirm the hope of a future life which is to be simply what the present would be if freed from its depressing conditions and its distressing events. Much of our ordinary thought about eternal life is of that crude sort. The New Testament in its imagery gives some support to such notions. But here, where Jesus is in most solemn fashion attempting a real definition, he speaks of a spiritual relation to God, wherein all a man's faculties lay hold on "him in whom we live and move and have our being." Such a conception of eternal life yields readily the idea of divine protection of which we are talking. What keeps men from the Evil One is the power, not of an end-

less existence, but of an eternal life. God put the lesser of these upon humanity once for all, and in spite of it humanity is given up to evil. He imparts the other to human consciousness with painstaking and difficulty through the revelation of himself in Jesus Christ. But when this is done, his "Lo, I am with you alway!" becomes a wall of defence and a tower of strength. "Looking up in unceasing prayer to our dear Lord Jesus," writes that marvel of missionaries, John G. Paton, "I left all in his hands, and felt immortal till my work was done." This is the sublime life that is "hid with Christ in God," possible for all believers, attained by too few, yet coming ever through beholding "the light of the knowledge of the glory of God in the face of Jesus Christ." Here is the Master's own explanation of the preservation of the saints, — no magic, no constraint, no mystery, only the power of the Gospel to deliver from all the assaults of evil, him whose life is given to that life.

Now, it was also for this that Jesus was about to sanctify himself in his atoning death, that they, in turn, might be consecrated wholly to the same revealing of grace and salvation. Their sanctification was to come when the Holy Spirit should take of the things of Christ and show them unto the disciples. But this could be only after the finishing of his sacrificial work. He must die for the sins of the people before the disciples could receive the truth in full, or be sanctified in it. Then, under the tremendous impetus of that greatest revelation of God's love and majesty, Peter and the apostles and many others after them might be so changed that the world would have no power to hurt them, and that their prayer should ever be, "Grant unto thy servants to speak thy word with all boldness."

We are now prepared, in retrospective view, better to see the place and meaning of Jesus' prayer for himself, "glorify

thy Son." If the name of God is the sphere in which, and the means by which, disciples are to be kept for service in the world, there is every reason for the setting forth of that name in all its splendor. The hour for an advance in revelation had come. All that Jesus could do, in the flesh, to make God known, he had done. Only under the illumination of his crowning deeds could the real conceptions, lying back of his conduct and teaching, come clearly into view. His victory was to be won amid the strong passion of his soul; for a man's greatest victory is to compel a true vision of his character. And this Jesus must secure in the Garden and on the Cross. For this supreme hour in Jesus' life was the supreme hour in the world's redemption. It was to prove that the humanity, which God had made in his own image, was able, even after ages of degeneracy, if only divinity were "tenting" in it, to rise to the heights of holy activity to which the Creator had destined it. Then, too, a well-nigh hopeless creation was to learn that its Creator would go to all wise and necessary lengths of atoning sacrifice, in the effort to bring his sinful creatures back to himself in love and service. He had come very close to them by his prophets. He was nearer yet in the person of his only-begotten Son. His heart was to beat as their hearts, when the voice should cry, "My God, my God, why hast thou forsaken me?" Then indeed "God was in Christ, reconciling the world unto himself," bearing our sins "in his own body on the tree."

In all this, the glory of both Father and Son was to be enhanced. For glory is but the reputation, with its accompanying splendors, which genuine character obtains in the eyes of intelligent beings. All through his public ministry Jesus had sought to be known for what he was. Starting out with odium attaching to his family and residence, his early occupation and lack of training, he heroically faced

and largely overcame it. Still more to silence the doubts of friends and the sneers of foes, he in this last hour sought with eager longing for further glory in the sight of men and angels. He would have nothing less than the glory which he had among the hosts of heaven before he took the form of man. It mattered much to him what men thought of his words and deeds and character. His glory was to be the lever to pry open their unbelieving minds. All that earth and heaven might have for him, he therefore summoned to his aid. The damning crime of ordinary men is selfishness. But Jesus, "the effulgence of God's glory and the very image of his substance," perfectly unites the selfish and the unselfish. To be or to have less than is his portion would be to lessen his ability to reveal his Father, and thus would thwart the grandly unselfish design of his incarnation. To glorify God by manifesting his name, Jesus must seek all that can be crowded into and upon himself of fullest glory on earth and in heaven.

Do we not find just here a rich suggestion for adjusting the persistent conflict between our proper instinct of self-love and our duty to forget self in loving God and men? Is it not true that as we, like Jesus, really exist in the image of God, our own glory becomes the glorifying of our God. "The heavens declare the glory of God; and the firmament sheweth his handy-work." Much more, then, should man, the most wonderful of his creations, do this. Our physical organism, mental powers, and spiritual faculties would in themselves praise our Maker. How much more should this be true when the Scripture teachings so closely identify the redeemed and their Redeemer? The avowed purpose of the Gospel is to restore our lost estate. With conscious and humble reference of all the processes of our salvation to God himself, we may well seek to be all that we can be. Indeed, as long as our endeavor is in the direction of holy living,

we may even pray that God shall make us honorable in the sight of our fellows, and may glory in our attainments. If the "greatest thing in the world" is love, and love is at its best in action, we too may reverently say, when we are loving unto sacrifice, "He that hath seen me, hath seen" something of "the Father."

Finally, the issue of the glorifying, the keeping, and the sanctifying of the disciples is "that they may be one, even as we are," or, more fully, "that they may all be one; even as thou, Father, art in me, and I in thee, that they also may be in us." "Now the God of patience and of comfort grant you to be of the same mind one with another according to Christ Jesus: that with one accord ye may with one mouth glorify the God and Father of our Lord Jesus Christ." "So then ye are . . . fellow-citizens with the saints, and of the household of God, being built upon the foundation of the apostles and prophets, Christ Jesus himself being the chief corner-stone; in whom each several building, fitly framed together, groweth into a holy temple in the Lord; in whom ye also are builded together for a habitation of God in the Spirit."

## Lesson VIII. November 22.

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### CHRIST BETRAYED.

*John xviii: 1-13.*

BY REV. PROFESSOR W. N. CLARKE, D. D., HAMILTON, N. Y.

**B**EHOLD our Saviour at the turning-point of his career. Until now he has lived the ordinary life of intercourse with men, moving about with his disciples, fulfilling the mission of the days; but now on a sudden all is changed, and he passes from his free life into the hands of enemies, to be led to death. Now he steps out from what is known as his "life" into what is called his "passion:" life is behind him, and death is close before. In our lesson we look upon him at this turning-point.

See how quietly the turning point comes. It is like most turning-points, — a step forward, and it is done! Jesus has spent the evening with his disciples in the upper room around the table, in high, sweet conversation, ending with a great and solemn prayer. The interview over, he leads them out into the night. The eastern limit of Jerusalem is a deep ravine, Kidron, the course of a winter torrent. Beyond it lies an enclosure named Gethsemane, or the oil-press, — a place of olive-trees, a quiet spot in which he has often found seclusion and repose with the little company of his friends. Thither he leads them now. One of the band has turned traitor, negotiated with the enemies of Jesus, and secured a band of armed men for the arrest of the Man of



Peace. Judas, gifted with the privileges of discipleship, knows the habit of the Master, and thinks to find him in the garden. What intimacy — what intimacy abused — do we see in this conviction of the betrayer that after such intercourse in the upper room as he was banished from, the Master will go forth beneath the sky for quiet prayer and contemplation! And thus it comes to pass that the decisive hour strikes. Jesus goes as he is wont, and the traitor takes advantage of what discipleship has taught him; so that the Saviour of men walks straight into the death that awaits him. How quietly meet the forces that turn his face toward death!

When we view our Lord in this crisis, we shall do well to remember that we are studying the Fourth Gospel, — the record and remembrance of the disciple whom Jesus loved. It has often been remarked that the Jesus of the Fourth Gospel is always kingly. Even throughout the passion John portrays him as always bearing himself with the self-possession of the true king of men. In this tender recollection of his dearest friend, he is not the victim but the conqueror. Calm, master of himself, aware of the significance of all that happens, he is the royal centre around whom gather all the persons of the drama. John does not gainsay the other narratives, which show us that the calmness was not gained without struggle; but he portrays our Lord in lovely and glorious self-possession. Here in the garden the kingly suffering begins. We are prepared for it, indeed, and look for the movements of a king, when once we have listened to the conversation in the upper room, and heard the prayer that he has just offered to his Father. One who has prayed in such a strain will be a king, we are sure, whatever comes upon him. Therefore we are not surprised when, in the record of the friend who knew him best, we see our Lord the only person in the whole group who is master of himself,

and find him still the strong, unselfish Jesus whom we have always known.

This kingly, divine self-poise is the explanation of the scene that we meet first in our lesson.

It is a most surprising scene. All unexpected, save as Jesus knew all things that were coming upon him, approach the traitor and his company. Judas guides the soldiers to the place. They are armed, of course, and they come bearing lanterns and surrounded by the glare of torches. The moon is at the full; but either because it is clouded in or because the shade of the olive-trees is deep, they bring these lights to find their prisoner. The disciples are looking for nothing of the kind; but the prophetic heart of the Master foreknew this, and he sent Judas out from the company of love, that he might do it quickly. When Jesus saw the flare of the torches and heard the tread of the coming troop, he knew at once, "This is it: the hour is come; now death lays hold upon me." Now therefore, if we watch him when the hour is come, we shall see what manner of person he really is. He will be no exception to the rule that crises reveal character.

You or I might hide, and let them search us out beneath the shade. Why must one hasten the event of death? Let them bring it on when they can. But not so does he. As for Jesus, he "knowing all things that were coming upon him, went forth, and met them, and saith unto them, Whom seek ye?" Not hiding, not evading, not delaying the event, he stands forth at once, takes the initiative himself, and himself directs the transactions of the hour. "Whom seek ye?" he asks. "Jesus of Nazareth" is the answer, — not, probably, of Judas, who is now mentioned as standing with them, but of some officer invested with authority to make the seizure. "I am he," is the calm reply of Jesus, who stands facing them, in perfect self-possession. They have come

out — half guard, half mob — to seize a dangerous enemy of the state, and here stands before them this calm and simple-hearted Man, transparently pure and sweet, the nobility of goodness upon his brow, the candor of truth in the tones of his voice, the tenderness of love in his entire bearing. He has no fear of them; he stands immeasurably superior to them. There is no halo on his head, no outshining of light and glory from his person; but there is a shining forth of what he really is, — an effluence of goodness, dignity, and power, by which a panic is instantly wrought among the men who came to seize him. Back they turn, they scatter, they stumble, they fall to the ground. They cannot lay their hands on him, or bear his fearless gaze, or even stand before him. There is no miracle about it, save as he is always miracle, — always human indeed, but always more than human in goodness, truth, and power. It is he that has done it, — he himself, by virtue of what is in him of personal dignity and evident moral grandeur.

But they rise and rally again. This must not continue; if he has overawed them, he must even help them, for they must do that for which they have come. Again therefore he asks, "Whom seek ye?" and when they answer "Jesus of Nazareth," he says, "I told you that I am he." But now he adds, turning to the little group that stood about him, "If therefore ye seek me, let these go their way." John, with the keen, sympathetic eyes of love, saw far into his Master's heart in this, and discerned the motive with which he craved safety for his friends. That very night in prayer he had said, "Of those whom thou gavest me I lost not one." He would not lose them, therefore he would guard them from trial greater than they could bear. Feeble in faith, untrained in hard experiences, not yet clear in understanding what their Master meant, they could not yet drink the cup that he was about to drink, or be baptized with the baptism

that he must undergo, and he would not bring them into the trial that must open before them if they went with him. Behold, he is the same Jesus, "Saviour, Brother, Friend." No threatening of death has turned his heart inward upon himself to the forgetting of his little ones. He still knows his own heart and directs his own course, and still does he hold love and tenderness toward these weak disciples as the strong motive of his heart. He saved them from further trouble, but himself he would not save. For them we hear him interceding that they may live, while for himself he turns not away from death.

It seems, however, as we look on, as if the disciples in their folly were bound to defeat his thoughtfulness, and get themselves seized along with him. The next thing that we see is the flashing of a sword, — not in the hands of some unawed ruffian in the band of Judas, but in the hands of Simon Peter, the leader of the apostles. Somehow he has obtained a sword, and now he draws it, and strikes out at the head of a man over against him in the varying light. So far does he miss his aim that he cuts off only an ear of the man, — one Malchus, servant of the high-priest. It is an attempt at rescue. The Lord's calm comprehension of the crisis has not communicated itself to all the company. But the main light from his act falls not so much on Peter as on the Lord himself. Once more in a crisis that calls for action does he stand revealed. The rash attempt at rescue throws its light on him and adds to the revelation of the hour. There he stands, the same as before, — the King. A disciple may act rashly, but if he does so he must be restrained and reprov'd, and the truth about this mysterious crisis must be spoken. Therefore the Lord speaks, uttering the genuine spirit of the Son of God, and says to Peter, "Put up the sword into the sheath; the cup which my Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?"

We call this submission. So it is; but it differs profoundly from what we call by that name in our common experience. It is not submission to the inevitable. There is an element in the occurrence that distinguishes it from that form of submission, which we find hard enough sometimes, but which nevertheless is easier than resistance to the inevitable. We shall see the difference if we complete the story from the narrative of Luke. There we read that when the ear of Malchus had been cut off, Jesus answered and said, "Suffer ye thus far," and touched the ear and healed it. And what did he mean by "Suffer ye thus far"? Already was he a prisoner, not yet bound, but already held in restraint by the men who surrounded him. Where he was standing, he could not reach the man upon whom he wished to lay a healing hand. Therefore he asked for the use of his hand, and perhaps for liberty to move a step or two. "Permit me thus far; let me use my hand as far as this," — so said the Mighty One of God, humbly and courteously craving permission of his captors to stretch forth the hand whose touch could heal. They did not refuse him; and stretching out his hand by their permission, he willed that a touch upon the wounded ear should give it soundness and health again. Health came at his touch; and then, drawing back his hand, he gave it once more into the keeping of the men who had but now gone backward and fallen to the ground at the shining forth of his goodness. When now they had that hand in their grasp again, and he was wholly their prisoner, they thought well to make sure of their capture; and so — wonder of wonders! — they laid their thongs upon his hands and bound him fast. That was their way with prisoners; for who can escape when he is firmly bound? See then the gentle Jesus in bonds; see the hands from which health has just been flowing bound with cords; see the Lord of life bound and not resisting!

It is a great sight, and divinely instructive. One of his friends has drawn a sword to kill his captors; but he has firmly forbidden the sword, and insisted upon drinking this, the cup which his Father has given him. Rejecting all resistance, he has craved permission of his enemies to do a work of healing power; he has wrought that deed, returned his hand to their keeping, and yielded it to their cords. This is submission; but who says it is submission to the inevitable? This is submission to the appointment of the Father. He did not bow as we do when we cannot do otherwise. He was master of himself and master of his destiny. He submitted, but he also consented. He did not merely yield to the appointment of his Father; he accepted it. He was not a victim, but a king; and this whole course was kingly action. He went with his enemies, not as their slave, but as a royal freeman, going by his own will as well as by theirs.

Herein he differs from us. We think it great to accept the inevitable and to make a virtue of necessity. We say, "The cup which the Father hath given me, *must* I not drink it?" ignoring the bitterness, since we cannot put the cup away. He said, "The cup which the Father hath given me, shall I not drink it?" Shall I not? Can I seek to do otherwise? Shall not my will accept it? This is genuine self-sacrifice, — a grace of which there is but little in accepting the bare inevitable and making a virtue of necessity. In truth, you cannot really make a virtue of necessity, any more than you can make bread of stones or clothes of newspapers. Necessity is not material for making virtue. The true self-sacrifice comes when it is not the inevitable that constrains us, but the heavenly Father's will, — when we bow, not to necessity, but to God, even our own God, whose will is right, and most acceptable to our obedient souls. Such was the mind of Jesus, and such is the



mind for us. He reached the height of virtue, in kingly, self-directing fellowship with his Father's will. Nor is this a mere display of the softer virtues, — an exhibition of the feminine graces, as we sometimes call them. Do not think of our Lord as strong only in the tender and yielding traits. Only try to live for a single day in imitation of his goodness, and see whether it does not tax your manliest powers, and call into exercise all the strongest, sturdiest virtues of which you are possessor. The preciousness of his life and of his sufferings lies for us in this, that he was the full-orbed, perfect man, in absolute fellowship of spirit with the holy will of God.

When they had bound him they led him off to Annas and Caiaphas, — priestly men, who had no eyes for his spiritual beauty, or for any high truth whatever. Caiaphas had already counselled the Jews that it was expedient that one man should die for the people; by which he meant that they should throw Jesus overboard, give him up to the Romans, — thereby to curry favor with their foreign masters and preserve their own political existence. Poor blind priest, he was bitterly wrong! It was true that Jesus should die for the people, but in no such way as that. The deep-seeing John interpreted that he should indeed die for the nation, and not for that nation only, but that he might also gather together into one the children of God that were scattered abroad. Not by being separated from men and set over against them was Jesus to save them, but by being one with them, by drawing them, by gathering them unto himself. "I, if I be lifted up from the earth, will draw all men unto me," — not by a death that could mean nothing to them, but by one that would bring them to know the fellowship of his sufferings, being made conformable unto his death, was he to become their Saviour. Caiaphas would make him a Jonah, thrown into the sea to save the shipload;



he himself would be a Moses, Captain of deliverance to the people whom he led. We are fully saved when we are like Jesus, and not till then. Take him for Saviour, seek his holy mind, and let him transform you into his own image ; thus will he see of the travail of his soul, and be satisfied.

Lesson IX. November 29.

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CHRIST BEFORE PILATE.

*John xix: 1-16.*

BY REV. F. CLATWORTHY, D. D., ADRIAN, MICH.

EVERY reader of the narrative of Christ's trial, whether in John or in the parallel passages of the Synoptic Gospels, must be amazed and shocked at the cruel rapidity and the awful play of passion with which events succeed one another during the fateful hours of crucifixion day. Mockeries of justice and refinements of torture are made to follow each other with breathless and heartless haste. Faster and faster, thicker and thicker, gather the clouds around that devoted head. Surely the prophecies are here fulfilled: the dumb Lamb is pitilessly hurried to the slaughter.

The priests, officers, and people had already, with strange accord, pronounced him guilty, they hardly knew of what. The charges were vague, witnesses were not agreed; but in bitter denunciation of the Holy and the Just there seemed but one mind and voice. From the whole Jewish multitude, gathered out of every nation, there is no record of a word lifted in defence of the innocent sufferer or in sympathy with him. Truly the Lord trod the winepress alone, and of the people there were none with him.

The closing incidents of the trial before Pilate are representative of the whole sad history of that eventful day. Jesus had come back from Herod "arrayed in a gorgeous

robe." It was evidence of the king's contemptuous mockery and of the fact that he could bring against Jesus no criminal indictment. This latter confirmed Pilate in the conviction, previously expressed, that the prisoner was guiltless. The conviction was strengthened, almost at the same moment, by an impressive warning from his wife. Chief priests and elders, however, would listen to no proposition of release. Incited by them, the multitude vociferously demand that the governor shall exercise his "passover clemency" toward Barabbas instead of Jesus.

Such is the intermingling and shifting of personalities and incidents which we find in this scripture that it will be well to group our thoughts under a few general heads: 1. Pilate. 2. Priests and the Priest-ridden. 3. The Sinless Sufferer.

#### PILATE.

In the opening verse of the narrative we find that the guilty hesitancy of the Roman governor is beginning to bear fruit. He "took Jesus and scourged him." Possessed of strong impulses toward justice, he had yet played with conscience and faltered in the discharge of duty. Mark an important lesson. To parley with wrong is to give it advantage. By Pilate's own confession the power to deliver Jesus to death or from death was in his hands. Repeatedly had he declared that he found no crime in him, and on each occasion he had sought to release him. In the shocking recital of relentless persecution it is refreshing to find these glimmers of pity from a Gentile. Amid the Babel of voices on that dreadful morning, none save those of the governor and his wife had in them any suggestion of good-will to the Accused. At the bars of Annas and Caiaphas there had been nought but pitiless condemnation. Before the great council there were heard only threats of death. Herod and his soldiers had indulged in cruel mockeries. At the tribu-

nal of Pilate alone was there discovered the absence of malice toward the prisoner. With him, too, the final disposition of the prisoner must rest. What a moment! What an opportunity to do good in doing right! Pilate sits on the "stately bema." The accusers, and also the accused, whom he had twice declared guiltless, are before him. If he would be innocent of the blood of that just man, now is the time to speak and act. Why does he not release Jesus at once, and, if needful, order his trusty soldiers to disperse the insolent mob? Many very fruitful lines of thought open here, which can hardly be more than suggested.

There was no doubt something to Pilate marvellously strange and deeply impressive about this accused one at his bar. He was no ordinary culprit, if culprit at all. His examination had greatly disturbed the mind and conscience of the judge. What could he think about the kingdom "not of this world,"—a kingdom of truth? He would fain know what truth was, yet feared to know; asking, but not waiting for an answer. There was a certain superstitious dread of consequence, quite aside from political fear, should he yield to the "ferocious cry for the cross." He knew the right; he felt moral obligation to do it. Had the impulse of the moment been given full play, Jesus would have gone free; but the impulse was weakened and rendered inoperative by his own moral condition and political environment.

The governor's record among the Jewish people was unsavory. In his treatment of them he had been not only impolitic but unjust. They had good grounds of complaint against him, and their murmurings had already reached the ears of the emperor. Pilate was afraid of them. While trying to assert itself, conscience made him a coward. The scourging was evidently allowed as a measure of compromise. In this also there was neither justice nor good policy.

To compromise with wrong is itself a wrong, and usually leads to larger evil and deeper guilt.

"Behold the man!" was only the summons to a more vehement cry for the cross. Pilate was at his wits' end. "Take ye him and crucify him, for I find no fault in him," was in part an utterance of despair, — a futile attempt to shift responsibility. The wily priests see his dilemma. They asked not compromise but unconditional surrender. With a new charge they make him the "more afraid." That this meek and suffering man should have styled himself a son of the gods, — for so the charge was probably interpreted, — seemed strange indeed. What could it mean? The Lord's majestic bearing, his quiet, dignified endurance of indignities worse than death, Claudia's dream, these words about a kingdom not of this world, — all now brought increased alarm; while another interview with the accused excites him still more. Awe of the sufferer and fear of the priests play upon Pilate alternately. Crowds closely watch the wretched man, and with the first sign of a rising resolution to decree justice, make their final and successful shout, "If thou let this man go, thou art not Cæsar's friend."

The trembling governor can stand no more. Thirst for office, and the desire to retain it when once secured, could exert then, as now, a most pernicious influence. The Roman emperors and the Roman senate cared but little for the real welfare of the provinces which they governed, while restlessness and insurrections among a tributary people were apt to raise presumptions against the competency or judgment of the governor. Politicians weighed their prospects in the first century as they weigh them in the nineteenth. The effects of popular movements and prejudices were as carefully calculated in the petty court at Cæsarea as now in the larger political circles of Washington or London.

The people even in that day had a power, though it was

not the power of the ballot. When Pilate was required to balance his own worldly interests against adherence to justice and truth, he preferred his interests. The friendship of Cæsar was more to him than the approbation of conscience and of God. Could he have saved Jesus without any sacrifice of self, he would doubtless have done so. There was the disposition to do it, and for this Pilate seems to have taken some credit to himself. We cannot allow his claim. The washing of his hands, as recorded by Matthew, and the declaration, even at the very last, that he was "innocent of the blood of that just person," do but confirm his guilt. Poor, deluded man! He was in the power and thralldom of sin, and sin had blinded his eyes. Ah! not with water can we wash away the stain of our complicity with evil.

From the lips of the Exalted One whom Pilate was judging there had fallen the words, "He that loseth his life for my sake shall find it." Paul could suffer the loss of all things, that he might win Christ; he counted not his life dear unto him. With Pilate it was not so. He put self first, and in seeking to save his life lost it. History has its revenges. Soon after this trial Pilate was banished, and according to tradition, his banishment was speedily followed by a self-inflicted death. Swiss peasants in the vicinity of Lake Lucerne will tell you a weird story about his ghostly form appearing often on Mount Pilatus, and there vainly attempting to wash away its guilt. Well may we fear that the truth is sadder than this fiction.

#### THE PRIESTS AND THE PRIEST-RIDDEN.

It is probable that Caiaphas, together with members of the Sanhedrim and a large company of resident priests, appeared in person before Pilate to press the charges against Jesus.

What a sight! Custodians of the temple of God, leaders

in the religious affairs of the nation, inciting the Jewish people in a wild cry for the blood of their Messiah!

That the priests were insincere admits of no doubt. Their charges changed with the necessities of the moment, or what they conceived to be the varying moods of Pilate. Because they cared little for truth or fairness, they were bent on compassing the death of One who walked not with them. Jesus knew them well. "Ye hypocrites!" had been his form of address to them more than once. Like priest, like people. Only a few days before, these multitudes had hailed Jesus as rightful heir to David's throne. Now they will nail him to the cross, because their ecclesiastical authorities desire it.

It is reported that Bonaparte once, when applauded by the Parisians, said to a friend sitting in his carriage, "Trust not the people; to-morrow they may send me to the guillotine." How evident is it that a sudden and remarkable change had taken place in the attitude of the masses at Jerusalem toward Jesus. It can be explained in no other way than that the priests had shown their hand, and that the people blindly followed. The priests cry "Blasphemy!" "Sedition!" "He ought to die!" "Crucify him!" and, parrot-like, the crowds repeat the words.

The events which led up to the scourging and the delivery of Christ to be crucified, show plainly that the common people were unreasoning dupes of the men in robes. The Jewish priesthood was ordained of God, but it had miserably fallen away from the divine purpose of its institution. The priests had become little more than a band of theological bigots and of political tyrants so far as they had any control or influence in the state. The priests venomously hated Christ because he taught doctrines too deep for them to teach. His wisdom had been gotten elsewhere than in the schools of the rabbis. He was out of accord with the traditions of the



elders ; he was not keeping step with their orthodoxy. Orthodoxy was of course what *they* accepted. Of all the things which a degenerate priesthood cannot and will not tolerate, the most obnoxious is a popular doctrine which they do not teach, and therefore do not authorize. Pilate saw through their flimsy pretence. "He knew that for envy they had delivered him."

The hypocrites ! One would fancy these priests to be the jealous guardians of the peace of the state. They charge Jesus with being a breeder of tumult. For this they would slay him. Yet when it suits their purpose they request the pardon of a noted criminal who has participated in sedition and committed murder. One would suppose them the loyal champions of the rights of the emperor. They accuse Jesus of forbidding tribute to Cæsar, and bring the stunning charge against the governor that if he sets Jesus free he is not Cæsar's friend. Yet it is notorious that they hated Cæsar, and would have done anything that they safely could to throw off the Roman yoke. Barabbas had stained his hands in blood in revolt against Cæsar. Yet for this very reason he endeared himself to them, and they cry lustily that he may be delivered from custody. Their insincerity is so transparent that our surprise rises to amazement as we behold the crowds swayed at their will and blindly following them. They were priest-ridden. Woe to the people who are thus led to surrender reason and conscience to others, whatever their scholarship and however great their pretensions to piety !

#### THE SINLESS SUFFERER.

We may assume that Jesus was personally a stranger to Pilate as he was to Herod. Almost the whole of our Lord's ministry had been confined to Galilee. His visits to Judæa since he left it, nearly three years before, had been few and

brief. That Pilate had heard of him there can be no doubt, and the dream and message of Claudia would indicate that he had been a subject of conversation in the palace.

Jesus is now before Pilate as a prisoner, — the Son of God on trial for his life at the tribunal of man! What a scene for the painter's brush! Where is the master-hand that shall portray it; where the imagination that can duly grasp even the essential features of a picture so unique and awe-inspiring? What! Is he who made all things, and without whom "was not anything made that was made," is he amenable to rules of justice as found on the statute-books of Cæsar? Is he subject to censure at the petty bar of Pilate? Nowhere can we find a fuller exhibition of divine self-abasement than in that which pictures an accused yet innocent and speechless Christ before this contemptible human court. He who could have summoned legions of angels drinks, without complaint, the cup of bitterness to the dregs. He was dumb, not because of sullenness or despair, but because the verities of his kingdom were grander than his carnal-hearted judges could understand.

Mark the Man of Sorrows! In three short verses John mentions the scourging and describes the mockeries. But what indignities and tortures do these words imply! The Roman flagellation was a merciless infliction, leaving the victim often more dead than alive. That in Christ's case it was attended with more than the usual barbarity seems clear from the heartless mockeries with which it was accompanied. The devout mind must dwell with awful solemnity upon these jeers and blows. They stand in closest relation to us, for the Smitten One "was wounded for our transgressions, he was bruised for our iniquities; the chastisement of our peace was upon him, and with his stripes we are healed."

Oh, the wonders of redemption! He whose voice might have made priests and governors to tremble, speaks not a

word while he gives his back to the smiters. These maddened murderers surely did not understand the deep meaning of their mockeries. They clothe the Sinless One in derisive scarlet, but know not that he who wears it is indeed the King of kings and Lord of lords. They plait a crown of thorns and press it upon his brow, but the thoughtless, cruel persecutors see not the Royalty whose throne is in the heavens, and before which they shall by and by stand in confusion and shame. They mock him with a reed, and wag their heads in merriment. Ah! deluded ones, that Hand holds the sceptre whose power all the nations shall feel; even the mighty Cæsar shall bow before it. They spit upon him and smite him with their hands while the "common hall" rings with their vulgar laughter. "He is weak," they say; "he cannot, he dare not, return our blows." Ignorant wretches, they do not know that the new pathway of glory which he has marked out is one of submissive obedience! Devils had always returned evil for good. Men had habitually returned evil for evil. But the dominant principle of the new kingdom was to return good for evil. What an illustration of his teaching, hardest to understand, does the "Man of Sorrows" give us during these awful hours! We are not surprised at the governor's exclamation, "Behold the man!"

It is not more Christ's meekness under suffering than a quiet, innocent dignity traceable in every feature and movement, that attracts attention. Even the repeated cry for the cross could effect no change in his placid face. To our cheeks such injustice would bring the crimson, and the revilings of the wicked would make it difficult for us to hold our tongues. That "man" was more than man. He who stood unmoved by scoffs and falsehoods was none other than the Son of God, guiltless of every crime alleged against him, suffering and dying that he might lift into life eternal a perishing world. Behold the *God-man*!

Consider, in closing, that the whole scene at Pilate's bar was a representative one. In the life of every person to whom the Gospel is preached there comes the time when decision must be rendered in regard to Christ, — whether he is indeed the Son of God. Political, moneyed, social, and other interests often seem to conflict with the promptings of duty. Whenever, in such cases, self is preferred, and conscience is stifled, then has Pilate found an imitator, and Christ is delivered to be crucified. In the never-ceasing conflict between Christ and the world, no one can be an indifferent spectator or stand on neutral ground. He who chooses not Christ will, in the end, choose Barabbas.

## Lesson X. December 6.

### CHRIST CRUCIFIED.

*John xix: 17-30.*

BY REV. Z. GRENELL, D. D., DETROIT, MICH.

THIS planet of ours was made to hold up a cross. Jesus was the "Lamb slain from the foundation of the world." The crucifixion of the Son of God was not an afterthought, it was part of God's original plan. When you come to the crucifixion you come to the most significant event that ever occurred in this world.

In studying the life of Jesus it is well to combine the writings of the four evangelists. The composite photograph illustrates a mental process of great value. Nowhere is such a method more fruitful than in the use we may make of the several accounts of the crucifixion. But there is also a certain advantage in studying one of these accounts alone. The composite photograph usually loses in distinctness as much as it gains in comprehensiveness. The limits of this discourse, however, compel us to seek the advantage of taking John's account by itself.

The course of events in the passage before us may be traced in certain prominent and suggestive phrases occurring at intervals in the narrative. These six will be noticed: "Bearing the cross;" "They crucified him;" "The King of the Jews;" "They cast lots;" "His mother;" "It is finished."

1. *Bearing the cross.* How abruptly the cross comes upon the scene! We have heard no sounds of preparation.

We cannot help thinking that this very cross has been used before ; that there are tell-tale holes in it, and dark stains upon it, and dried earth clinging to its sharpened end. Probably Jesus had never seen a cross before, with his human eyes ; and now this foul and cruel thing is thrust upon his sight and laid upon his shoulder.

It has come far to meet him. The cross had its origin in the distant East ; Alexander brought it to the West. It had been set up by every great city to lift on its rude arms peculiarly odious criminals and condemned slaves. Rome brought it to Judæa to terrify the insurrectionary Jew. So the cross has journeyed from land to land, getting a meaning. And now, having made for itself a place in human thought and speech as signifying mortal pain and deepest disgrace, here it is, ready to inflict its shameful and fatal torture upon the innocent Jesus.

If you will look backward from this point fifteen hundred years, directing your eyes toward a certain spot in the desert to the south of Palestine, you may see a man making a cross. A stake and cross-bar are fitted together, and around them is wound the form of a serpent moulded out of brass. It is set up upon a hillock in the midst of the camp of Israel, to be a miraculous means of cure for the guilty and dying people. The story of that singular transaction, put into sacred writings and pondered by generations of Israelites, was not understood as to its interior meaning until one night the Prophet of Galilee explained it to a ruler of the Jews.

Here on the gospel page we see the Man and the cross meeting for the first time. The Man has come from beyond the desert of the brazen serpent, stepping from altar to altar : now veiled in the rich symbols of tabernacle and temple, now moving across historic pages in the garb of many a shining type. He has come by way of the manger in Bethlehem, dripping out of the Jordan, moving along the highways

and sea-sands of Galilee, across the hills of Samaria, from the home in Bethany, through the shadows of Gethsemane, out of the presence of the Sanhedrim and Pilate's judgment-seat; and here he stands, worn, sad, silent, patient, with red drops trickling down his face, and others unseen oozing from fresh-made furrows beneath the clothing that covers his lacerated back, ready for the cross. And he meekly receives it and bears it to the place of execution.

"Bearing the cross:" what do we mean when we apply that expression to ourselves? What can we mean but the acceptance of suffering and shame and death in the name of Jesus? To speak, as we sometimes do, of the performance of simple duties as cross-bearing, is to belittle a phrase which our Saviour has made great.

2. *They crucified him.* Bearing his woful burden, bent with a weight that rested with crushing gravity upon his spirit rather than on his body, Jesus was led out of the city gate, and came to the hillock whose rounded top bore the semblance of a human skull. There the four Roman soldiers detailed for the purpose laid him supine upon the cross, and extended his unresisting form, and drove the nails through his open palms and his folded feet. Then they raised the burdened cross and settled it in its place with business-like stolidity, while the blood dropped down upon them.

Who crucified him? Are these soldiers the responsible parties? They are the least responsible of all who were immediately concerned, for they had least opportunity for choice. Pilate did it. He and the soldiers only? Not so. The rulers of the Jews did it. To them Peter brought home the charge of murder, with terrible emphasis upon the accusing "Ye." Does the responsibility end there? Certainly not; all the mad mob that stood before Pilate's hall at dawn and shouted "Crucify him," and invoked his blood upon themselves and their posterity, were guilty of his



death. Nor may we even thus limit the responsibility of that enormous crime. Who was there that did not share in it? Was there an absolutely guiltless one in all that assemblage, from sneering priest to weeping women? Nay, more: who of all the sinful race, from Adam down to the last man, was not involved in the blame of it? It was not men, but man, that slew the Lord. The guilt the cross proclaims in the intensity of its pains, and for which it provides atonement in the outflow of precious blood, is the guilt it illustrates. All forms and degrees of sin have their fullest and truest expression in this one comprehensive offence,—the crucifixion of the Son of God.

He was not crucified alone. As if to give color to the charge that Jesus was an evil-doer, two others, justly condemned, were put to death in the same way at the same time. But this attempt to stigmatize him was a failure. Instead of degrading Jesus, it elevated man. Besides supplying one of the marks of his messiahship, and besides giving occasion for a remarkable display of his saving power upon one of the thieves, it illustrated the possibility of a high heroism for us all. To be “crucified with Christ” is a thing to be prayerfully desired and devoutly suffered by all who love him.

3. *The King of the Jews.* It is said to have been the custom to place above the head of one crucified a writing naming the crime for which he was executed. Pilate made use of this custom to vent his spite against the Jews. With his own hand he prepared an inscription and had it fastened to the cross.

This writing would excite special curiosity. What crime would Pilate charge upon this man? Jesus had been condemned by the Sanhedrim as a blasphemer. Before Pilate the charge was sedition. But the governor, having privately examined him, declared him innocent of all that was charged

against him. What, then, will he write above him on the cross? Many of the Jews came to see. And they found there no accusation, only a proclamation: "Jesus of Nazareth, the King of the Jews." Pilate was mocking them. They saw the point and felt the sting of it. But they thought it might be changed, so the chief priests came to Pilate with the request that the writing might be amended so as to read, "Jesus of Nazareth, who *said* he was King of the Jews." This would take the edge off the official sneer. But Pilate was in no mood to grant their request. He had already yielded too much. Against the current of his superstitious fears, and against his sense of justice, and despite his studious and repeated efforts to secure the release of the accused, he had been forced by a manufactured popular clamor to give sentence against an innocent man. He will bend no further. With a surly assertion of independence which was lamentably late, he dismissed the priests. The writing shall stand. "What I have written, I have written." Emphasize the capital *I* both times, and you will catch the spirit of Pilate's self assertion, — absurdly consequential, since it was so long coming and since it grounded itself on so small a matter.

But Pilate wrote better than he knew. Jesus was king of the Jews by divine appointment and as heir of the royal house of David. The Providence which evokes praises even from men's wrath was behind Pilate's brain and hand. As Caiaphas, the highest religious official in the land, unconsciously announced the messiahship of Jesus, so did Pilate, the highest civil authority, declare his kingship. Pilate's sneer, like the mock homage of the soldiers, was the proclamation of sublime truth. Solemn eyes look through the grinning mask.

Thrice was the title written, — in Hebrew, in Greek, and in Latin. Probably the intention was to address the largest

number of readers; but here again we discover a deeper intention than that of the writer. Hebrew was then in its decay; Greek was at that time the most universal language; but Latin was the rising speech, destined to dominate in the world's literature, as Roman arms had conquered the world's kingdoms. Thus Pilate's writing proclaimed the kingship of Jesus across all the latitudes of time.

Nor is this all. Hebrew was the speech of the one people who had had a specifically religious training; its vocabulary was saturated with religious ideas. Greek was the speech of the people who were foremost in the domains of intellectual philosophy. Latin was the speech of the people who laid the foundations of civil jurisprudence for all the after-civilizations. Thus the writing on the cross was made in the specific languages of religion, philosophy, and law; and as Jesus was declared king in these three languages, there was an intimation that his doctrine was destined to be the master religion, the master philosophy, and the master law of the world. The world will be right in its worship, its wisdom, and its social adjustments when the crucified Jesus is acknowledged universal Lord.

4. *They cast lots.* By custom the clothing of Jesus became the property of the soldiers who executed him. He who clothed our shamefaced parents was disrobed when he made expiation for their sins and ours. Probably his clothing was that of the common man of the time,—an outer garment, or cloak, reaching from the neck to the ankles; an under-garment, or coat, worn next the skin, sleeveless, and ending at the knees; a girdle, an important and often elaborate article of dress, wound about the waist and knotted in front or at the side; and sandals for the feet.

In making the division the soldiers came to the tunic, and discovered that it was seamless. It could not be ripped, as probably the cloak had been. To rend it would be to destroy

it. It was agreed, therefore, to cast lots for it. And so at the foot of the cross where Jesus suffers we have the spectacle of the soldiers shaking the dice in an inverted helmet, and casting them in turn to see who shall have the coveted garment. What more striking illustration can we find of the hard and pitiless spirit of the gamester? It is the same in all times and places. The vice of gambling breeds a fierce eagerness for sudden gain that deadens the natural sympathies of those who indulge it.

It has been said that the prediction in the Twenty-second Psalm, which was thus exactly fulfilled, shows us that prophecy did not disdain to give us, even in unimportant matters, marks by which the dying Jesus might be identified as the Messiah. It may be so. But was this an unimportant matter? There is peculiar significance in the disposition thus made of the clothing of our Lord. It assures us that these garments were never resumed by him. Probably the soldiers appropriated them to their own personal use, and they were worn out in the barracks, the broil, the march, the battle. When the naked form was taken down from the cross and prepared for burial, it was wrapped in clean linen; when the Lord had risen, the linen cloths were found in the tomb. But immediately after his resurrection he was seen by the Magdalene, not naked, but clothed; for she thought he was the gardener going early to his work. Whence came the clothing in which the Lord was seen robed after his resurrection? Let those answer who do not believe that the body of the risen Saviour was the "spiritual body" of which Paul writes.

5. *His mother.* Not far from the cross is a tearful group, composed mainly of the women who have followed the Master in his last journey from Galilee. In this company are Mary, the mother of Jesus, and John, "the disciple whom Jesus loved." To these two the divine Sufferer speaks,

"making his will," as some one has said. In the midst of his bodily pains and his greater anguish of soul his human affection asserts itself and he makes provision for his dependent, probably widowed, mother. In the briefest words he indicates his desire that henceforth Mary and John shall be to each other as mother and son. They understood and obeyed; "and from that hour the disciple took her unto his own home."

Thus did our Lord care for the woman who bore him,—an example that should be pressed upon the attention of the young,—and thus did he at the same time honor the affectionate steadfastness of the one disciple who stood nearest to him in the hour of his suffering. These lessons are the more impressive that they are framed into the supreme anguish and grief of the cross. But while Jesus thus exemplifies a son's fidelity in the most affecting circumstances, we do not find here or elsewhere in the inspired records any ground for that high elevation of the mother of Jesus in the faith and worship of men to which the Church of Rome would lift her. The words of Luke xi. 27, 28, in which our Lord himself anticipated and gave warning against mariolatry, should not be forgotten.

6. *It is finished.* The hours pass. At nine o'clock in the morning Jesus was lifted up; at three o'clock in the afternoon he expired. Midway between these two points of time the darkness came upon the land and remained until Jesus had breathed his last. Through these hours the tokens of physical suffering are as distinctly evident as those of the distress of his spirit. Feverish conditions follow the effusion of blood, and we hear the exclamation, "I thirst!" The pains of Jesus are not diminished by his divine power. He is exposed to all that the most sensitive frame can suffer. Still, he graciously accepts a tribute of pity. Though he refused the draught offered him at first to blunt his senses,

he receives the slight refreshment lifted to his lips upon a sponge that has been dipped in the sour wine placed near for the soldiers' use. Thus does our dying Lord declare the reality of his bodily sufferings, and his willingness to accept the compassion of men.

Then the end came. Jesus recognized its approach, and gathered up his energies for the last word of all, — one of the two "loud" voices from the cross, "It is finished." It was a shout of triumph, proclaiming not only the end of his sufferings, but more than that, — the accomplishment of all that the types had pictured and all that the prophets had spoken up to this crowning point in the plan of God for bringing many sons unto glory.

## Lesson XI. December 13.

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### CHRIST RISEN.

*John xx: 1-18.*

BY REV. CHARLES A. REESE, RUTLAND, VT.

ALTHOUGH Mary Magdalene left her home while it was yet dark, the sun was shining with Oriental splendor when the inspection of the tomb was made. Natural vision was not obscured by darkness. The conclusion of the witnesses as to both the death and the resurrection of the Lord was reached in daylight. No cabinet or quickly closing doors or shaded lamps accompany the evidence. The first day had received the touch which made it forever the calmest, brightest day in each revolving circle of seven days.

The conditions of the resurrection, like all life, are veiled in mystery ; but as to the fact itself, we have as good evidence as history affords for any event. The Apostle John gives us the account from his own standpoint. The followers of Jesus, both men and women, believed his death real and final. This was their fixed conviction on that memorable morning. The possibility of his having arisen had not entered their minds.

John records for us the steps by which they all came to the opposite conclusion. He traces particularly the progress of faith in Peter, for whom Jesus especially prayed ; in John, whom Jesus especially loved ; in Mary, whom Jesus espe-



cially befriended ; in Thomas, who resolutely doubted ; and, finally, in the five others who knew Jesus as he came fresh from the tomb, when he appeared most like an ordinary man. We are concerned with the first three.

1. *The early visit.* During the seventh day Love obeyed the sabbath law. The graves of loved ones are stumbling-blocks if they call from worship of the living God at the appointed time. Far too much work and pleasure are glossed with a thin wash of necessity and sentimentality, and performed upon the Christian sabbath. The Pilgrims would not disembark upon the Lord's Day ; the disciples did not visit the tomb upon their sabbath.

But at last love was free to act. Early on the first day of the week Mary Magdalene, probably with other women, hastened to the sepulchre. Her surprise that the stone was rolled away was preliminary to a dreadful fear. The genuineness of the story is shown by the artlessness of the narrator, who notes Mary's natural but untrue explanation of the empty tomb : "They have taken away the Lord out of the sepulchre, and we know not where they have laid him." She had no thought of his resurrection. And does not the feverish anxiety of this age lest some hostile hand should sweep Christianity from the world reveal Mary's dim conception of the power and majesty of Jesus ? For those few moments, so unequalled in history, Mary may be excused for fearing ; but fear at what the enemies of Christ can do is to-day neither reasonable nor excusable. All doubt as to the final issue of the moral conflict implies a half belief that men took the Lord from the sepulchre.

Peter and John fear too. They run, as Mary had done, regardless of appearances. If Peter thinks of his late denial, it does not retard his course. He runs as he always acts, — impulsively and with all his might. Both start with promptness, celerity, and energy. The apostles are minute-men.

2. *The examination and testimony of the tomb.* Brushing the dew from the garden shrubs and anticipating the early sunbeams, these intensely earnest men approach the sepulchre. Contrary to what we should expect, the contemplative John outruns the fiery Peter. But as John arrives before the door of the silent chamber, he does not enter. With all his physical energy, reason rules his feet. His zeal, his youthful strength, are crowned with reverence for what is divine. Reverence too seldom accompanies activity. Reverence — the fear of the Lord — is the beginning of wisdom.

The opposite is seen in Peter, who is bold, ardent, impatient of delay. He makes no pause, but immediately enters the holy place. His lack of awe in entering is pardonable, because of the service he did while there for all mankind. He came to read, mark, learn, and inwardly digest the evidence. John uses three words to describe the examination of the tomb and its contents. He gives Peter the credit for making the boldest, closest scrutiny. Careful inspection could not be more emphatically indicated. They mentally photographed the interior. John marked the linen cloths lying, with no body enwrapped. Peter with his own strong vision saw these cloths in the same strange state, and the napkin that was about the Lord's head folded, and laid in a place by itself. John is particular to call them linen bandages, because such was the material provided by Joseph of Arimathea.

The order is, first, data; second, a theory which shall include all the given facts. If the tomb had not been scrutinized by witnesses before the resurrection was announced, before their minds were beginning to believe in it, we should feel that a link was lacking, and wish that the apostles had proceeded more slowly. The state of the tomb upon that morning is the first thing we wish to know; we then seek a fact that will explain it.

For these minute details we are indebted to Peter and John. They saw the empty tomb and the condition of its contents. They were two of the three apostles who had been most intimate with the Lord, and knew him better than any other persons in the world. Their judgment had been sharpened by their Teacher, and they had formed careful conclusions again and again upon things material and things spiritual. They could not be deceived.

3. *The new faith.* The men saw that the body had not been removed by stealth or in haste, — that in fact it had not *been* removed at all. For why should a lifeless body be stripped of its grave-clothes if either foe or friend were removing it? It was a critical moment. The Holy Spirit was showing them the things of Christ. John says he saw and believed, speaking only of himself because belief is a personal matter. Peter may have believed as strongly as he, but to say "I believe," as John practically does, is more convincing than to tell what others believe. "I saw and believed," is the goal to which John's entire Gospel is intended to lead. In it he tells how men saw Jesus and believed in him. He loves to dwell upon these acts as the two hinges to the door of the kingdom. At last he himself saw and believed what he had never believed before; and he relates with grateful and never-to-be-obliterated memory how that very moment he was born into the new truth and the new life. He perceived, with a vision which persecutions could not bedim or the Apocalypse make brighter, that Jesus is the Christ, the Son of God, and that, believing, we may have life through his name.

In this conclusion Peter was probably behind John, though he entered the sepulchre first, and was most active in inspecting its interior. Cautious, reflecting minds like John's are the spiritual leaders of the Church. Activity and push are not all that Christ's cause needs. Modern impetuosity

and speed in compassing results often cause the so-called earnest ones to overlook hidden treasure.

“For fools rush in where angels fear to tread.”

They rush in, but they come out no wiser. It is not enough in any pursuit merely to “get there.” In this day of rapid thinking and much speaking, of haste and ambition for religious ends, let us remember that it is not by bodily or by any other exercise, except that of the spirit working with the truth, that Christ is discerned and glorified. As Peter unconsciously influenced John to enter the tomb, so when there Peter needed John’s penetration as an aid to faith.

At this point John adds: “For as yet they knew not the Scripture, that he must rise from the dead.” Whatever self-reproach he felt because of his slowness to believe the prophecies, it seems to have been a source of satisfaction to him that this very sin might render his testimony worth the more to the world. For it was not a preconceived idea that begot the faith they now held; but the proof that Christ was again alive led them to see for the first time the picture of the risen Messiah drawn imperishable in the Scriptures.

This confutes forever the theory that Peter and John saw what their minds, full of vagaries and fancies, were prepared to see. They came to the tomb with no expectation of anything but to be met by wicked men, with no “perhaps” or “may be” in mind, in ignorance of the divine plan and in dread of new human cruelties; but the now discovered fact that Christ was already Lord of death filled them with joy and illuminated the Scriptures for them. How old passages of the Word of God seemed to be voices as of an army of shining angels celebrating the morning of all mornings! How the sun, which had been darkened only a few hours before, seemed again to pale beside the heaven-accredited Light of the world!

What are they to do now? Shall they simply stand by the despoiled sepulchre, proclaim the news, and mock the disconcerted rulers? Shall they call the disheartened apostles and disciples? Shall they seek the Lord and put him before the public? No; Christ, who is Master of death, is also Master of the Church, of the world, and of history. They would await his own procedure; and so they "went away again unto their own home."

How fortunate that the first place to which the news was carried was "home"! Where does the resurrection mean so much as there? Where else do so many flowers of hope and trust blossom about the thought of the resurrection? Sweet and inspiring as is the conception of immortality, it is better adapted to the study than to the household. Only the doctrine of the resurrection will satisfy the yearnings of husband and wife, of father, mother, children, for light concerning the dead. It warrants expectation that recognition and communion will follow death, and that departed Christian friends will not be essentially different from what they were on earth. No home is complete without Him who rose from the dead.

4. *The apparition of the angels.* The picture of Mary, who soon followed Peter and John back to the sepulchre, standing in tears, peering into the tomb, is a picture of grief very old yet very new. So Jacob wept for Rachel; so Joseph wept for Jacob; so the confused, bereft, disconsolate ones to day face the blank wall which death rears. Mary has lost her wonderful Rescuer, her Adviser, her Friend, who had raised up friends and respect in her behalf. Mystery is now added to that great loss. Why is she denied the simple but inestimable privilege of seeing his peaceful face once more, and of performing for him the last rites? Yet, looking into the sepulchre, Mary saw in her dire need what Peter and John did not see, — two angels, at appointed places, where Jesus had lain. The dispensation of divine light is

different to different minds. The two apostles did not need the angelic appearance; they gained their comfort by an act of direct faith. Mary received hers piecemeal, through a more striking and mysterious but less direct ministry. The Lord adapts himself to the strength of one and to the weakness of another, yet leaves heavenly influences behind him everywhere.

Hark, the angels speak! "Why weepest thou?" Angels are sympathetic, but sympathy alone is not sufficient for such an hour. How little angelic sympathy seemed to do now! Men need not wonder if their words do not avail for comfort in bereavement. Advancing a little to the next scene, we hear again, "Why weepest thou?" this time spoken by the Lord himself. O fellow-man, gazing at the sepulchre of buried friends, with no spiritual hunger and with no insight into the facts which Jesus' tomb presents, you cannot but weep! But if faith leads you to look within Christ's sepulchre and to view the subject of death according to God's thought of it, "Why weepest thou?"

5. *The manifestation of Jesus to Mary.* Deep feeling of bereavement excludes from Mary's mind for the time every other thought and perception. She knew not Jesus, because she was thinking only of her loss. Moreover, the resurrection was not conceived of; and, besides, the Lord had undergone a change, at least in the aspect of his body.

But the soul of Jesus was unaltered, — his spirit, which had taught them the Scriptures, beamed through his eyes and spoken through his lips, prayed for them and loved them, and weighted for them with precious truth many and many a word. This is the same after his death and resurrection as before. "Mary," said the Lord; "Rabboni," answered Mary. Scarcely anything else reveals identity like the human voice. This was a step nearer a demonstration of the resurrection than the cerements and the emptiness of the sepulchre. In



an instant, in the presence of Christ, Mary's eyes are opened, and grief and despair flee away. Her nature, so large and deep that once seven demons could use it, which just now felt a sevenfold sorrow, overflows with joy sevenfold great. In her ignorance and stony grief she had turned her back upon the Lord; now, in the light of his glorious life, she throws herself at his feet.

6. *The new instruction.* What mind would have invented the conclusion of this story! The Lord himself is as calm and as superior to his great triumph as when the ruler's daughter came to life at his touch, or Lazarus arose at his call. Mary believes that it is the Lord, but the very ardor of her love leads her to seek every proof. She wishes to assure herself through the sense of touch and by renewing their former friendship and communion on the earthly plane. In refusing this, Jesus assumes a new relation. "Touch me not; for I am not yet ascended to my Father." As if he had said: Do not rest your new faith upon my corporeal life, but upon that life which will soon be consummated with my Father. There I shall receive your love and we will resume our fellowship.

Here is a lesson for all. When faith has won victory on its own high ground, why should we crave the lower testimony of the senses and a smaller promise? Why should "they that have not seen and yet have believed," wish to exchange places with Thomas, who was offered the Lord's hands and side to help him to faith? Mary had already made a good beginning in faith, and therefore Christ would not allow her to touch him physically. He says by his prohibition: Having taken a few steps by faith, walk no more by sight. One touch through the Holy Ghost is worth far more than any bodily presence.

Christ's new way of meeting his disciples only makes them nearer and dearer to him than before. He calls them "my



brethren," — a term of higher honor than he had used hitherto. It promises the same sonship to God as his, and the same fatherhood in God that he enjoyed. Henceforth they are brethren of Death's Conqueror and sons of Christ's Father and Christ's God. Life and revelation can rise no higher.

A new command secures the publication of this message: Go to my brethren and tell them I am risen. If faith grows feeble amid the distractions of the world, Mary and all who take the same message will find in the act of obedience as well as in the communication itself the confirming proof that they are not deceived. An empty mind will doubt; aimless feet will wander. What the Lord has spoken to us is reassurance that we have seen him.

Let others find satisfaction for the historic faculty in contemplating the deeds of Alexander, Cæsar, or Napoleon; here is a record more trustworthy than theirs. Let infidels judge the Church by some poor section of it, and pronounce it a merely human organization; we look at the life of the whole through the centuries, and declare its faith that Christ rose from the dead to be the only key to its grand history. Explain if you can the labors of the apostles as the works of deluded men or impostors; we cannot insult our reason by so believing. The fact of the resurrection is the only consideration able to account for their labors and sacrifices.

## Lesson XII. December 20.

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### THE RISEN CHRIST AND HIS DISCIPLES.

*John xxi: 1-14.*

BY REV. PROFESSOR J. M. STIFLER, D.D., UPLAND, PA.

THE last chapter of the Gospel of John is an appendix, and not a supplement. The story of Jesus' life, death, and resurrection closed somewhat hurriedly with the preceding chapter. But now what about the future? What about the disciples' work for the world? This chapter answers. The relation between the Gospel of John and this appendix is the same as that between Luke's Gospel and his book of the Acts. The latter is the sequel of the former. Luke's Gospel related what Jesus "began to do and teach." The Acts show how Jesus carried on his work. Only, the Acts is a history of work done after the resurrection; the chapter before us is rather a prophecy, with its dimmer outlines.

Hence this twenty-first chapter is concerned about work, and about the disciples' future until Jesus comes again. He meets them in their toil, gives the chief apostle his office, "feed my sheep," and as a last act the story shows Jesus leading, whither we are not told, while the disciples are following. It is quite possible, too, that John's last statement, "even the world itself could not contain the books" if a full record of Jesus' deeds were written, refers to his enthroned history, and is not an inept repetition of his previous

declaration that "many other signs truly did Jesus which are not written in this book." The latter statement closes the history of his career while on earth; the former sums up what had been done after the ascension to the time when John wrote, and is the book of Acts in a nutshell.

John records three official appearances of the Lord, the one to Mary being personal. In the first, Jesus proves the reality of his resurrection, and commissions his disciples; in the second, he rescues the doubter; and in this third he does a miracle, which, as they subsequently reflected upon it, would encourage and guide them in leading men to himself. There are three points: 1. Jesus guides the disciples in their work. 2. Jesus is revealed to the disciples in their work. 3. Jesus eats with the disciples after their work.

1. *Jesus guides the disciples in their work.* The work was commonplace, — fishing; the story is simple, but the feelings of the actors must have been profound. The feast at Jerusalem is over. The disciples have made the journey of a long week's travel back to Galilee. It is not the Galilee of a few former months. There is no assembling of crowds for instruction, no miracles of mercy, no loved leader to keep the disciples in one body. Four are lacking on this fishing excursion. He has been seen alive after his passion, but not here in Galilee; it was away in Jerusalem. Galilee doubtless thinks that Jesus is no more. The atmosphere surrounding the eleven is oppressive; they are lonesome, idle, restless. The active spirit of Peter must find something to do. He proposes to go a fishing, and six more of them accompany him. Success does not attend their effort. Perhaps, in the mood of suspense and doubt affecting them, they did not ply their craft skilfully. At any rate, "that night they caught nothing." In the light of the early morning a stranger, as they supposed, is seen standing on the shore. They note but do not know him. At last he hails them,

—“Children, have you any meat?” They answer, “No,” — no meat, despite their toil. And this little negative is the only word addressed to him in this entire event. He now directs them where to cast the net. They obey, and fish in abundance are enclosed in the net.

But the story must be looked at once more, for the story itself is the lesson. There is a minute particularity about it. We are told who and how many composed the company, and how they came to “go a fishing.” They noted that Jesus “stood” on the shore. The distance of the ship from the land is given. The ordinary fact that Peter pulled on his coat before he swam to land is not omitted. The exact number of the fish is given. They came to land in the little ship. They find not simply a fire, its condition is marked, — a fire of “coals.” In the two appearances recorded before by John we have few particulars. The attention is called mainly to the Saviour’s person. In comparing this with the similar story in the fifth chapter of Luke, we find the latter much more scant in details. Now, what can this minuteness of mention mean, except to convey the deep impress of this event on the disciples’ minds? This third meeting with the Saviour touched them profoundly. It glorified every little item connected with the meeting, so that we know not only the kind of coat which Peter had at this time, — a “fisher’s coat,” — but how he put it on. These details, whatever other value they may have, certainly show how the hearts of the seven fishermen were wrought upon.

Impressions, feelings, move men. Thought is born of them, and the whole course of life may be changed by them. The stars have no voice, no language, but their “line is gone out through all the earth.” The story before us is but a story; “Jesus showed himself to his disciples” in a “manner” they never forgot. There is a vagueness in the account, as there was not a little mystery in the appearance. Whence came

that fire of coals, and the fish laid thereon, and the bread? This very wonder must have intensified the whole scene for them. Intensity was necessary. From the feelings of this hour they were to find not only the course of their own life but also the wisdom to direct the world's. In the transfiguration they saw his divinity; in the foot-washing they perceived his humility; and now in this hour of fishing they had set before them the lesson of their coming leadership of the world. Not a solitary rule for the future is here given; there is no instruction; Jesus appears to them in a *way* to make them think. And such thought is free. No man labors well anywhere, and certainly not for God, unless the centre of his activity is freedom itself. These seven disciples must gather from what they now see, how to serve Jesus. There is no rule to bind them. In taking these fish they learn how they are to catch men.

Just here it can be remarked, first of all, that the disciples would surely recall, instantly recall, that former fishing scene in which, as in this, they took nothing until Jesus taught them how. Left to themselves, their labors were abortive, but under his direction many fish were taken. In a word, his guidance was necessary to future success.

Again, they could not fail to remember how on that former occasion Jesus had promised to make them fishers of men. In this recollection the prose of the work in hand would at once change to poetry. Their minds would be elevated from the level of the mere fisherman to the mountainous height of Jesus' purpose for them, — a purpose that embraced a world in its mercy. The work in hand was a parable of the glorious work which they were to do. These who were winning fish were to win men, — an office as much greater as a man is better than a fish. The sharpest rebuke the disciples ever received from the tender-hearted Lord was occasioned by their failure to be impressed by his feeding

the multitudes. He was educating the twelve; and when they missed the lesson, Jesus sharply said, "How is it that ye do not understand?" The men who changed the religion of the Roman empire were not so dull that they could now miss another lesson. Jesus had not come to them this morning merely to show them where to cast a fishing-net. His heart, which could be satisfied with nothing less than the world's love, — the world, for which he died, — was earnest in equipping his disciples to win that love. And could they possibly misunderstand his effort? They had set out to catch some fish. Jesus graciously comes and converts their honest intent into a parable to instruct them how to win the world.

Once more, the fish in that earlier miracle of their history, and the fish caught at this time, were secured only when Jesus showed where to cast the net. But there is one striking difference in the two cases, pictured by T. D. Bernard, as follows: "The gospels have been brought to a fit and, as it seems from the final words, an intended conclusion at the end of the twentieth chapter of St. John; but another chapter is added, as if dictated by some after-thought, which in its effect links the whole gospel record to the book which succeeds it. The miracle which had already foreshadowed the work of the fishers of men is repeated, but with altered circumstances, typical of the change which was at hand. For now the Lord is no longer with them in the ship, but stands dimly seen upon the shore; yet from thence issues his directions, and shows the presence of his power working with them in their seemingly lonely toil."

The Saviour's acts are not less instructive than his utterances. After this hour the apostles knew how Jesus would guide them, and that that guidance would issue from the shores of the other world.

2. *Jesus is revealed to the disciples in their work.* Here

again we are brought face to face with the earlier miracle. There it is Peter who is impressed with the majesty and holiness of Jesus. He had seen many wonders before, but that one in which the net "enclosed a great multitude of fishes" was in his own line of things. He understood it as he had not understood other miracles. It revealed the Christ to him, and in honest attestation of Jesus' purity Peter falls down before him and worships, confessing his own sinfulness. Again the work discloses the workman; only this time it is John who first makes the discovery, declaring to his fellow-disciples, "It is the Lord." But they now know him in a worthier way. Before, the cry was, "Depart from me, for I am a sinful man;" but now Peter, although he had grievously denied the Saviour, is so eager to get to him and to look in his eyes that he cannot await the movement of the boat. He girds on his fisher's coat, and plunging into the sea, swims ashore. "It is the Lord," said the beloved disciple; for again Jesus had come to them in a sphere in which they were at home, in toil with which they were perfectly acquainted. That net full of fishes was such a revelation of the Christ to them as they had not reached in the more wonderful miracles of feeding the multitude, casting out demons, or raising the dead; for in these he did his own work, but in the draught of fishes he helped the disciples in theirs. Though the power was still all his own, he became a fellow-helper with them. Henceforth he will work mightily through them and with them.

This revelation was to serve the disciples in two ways. It was necessary that the "Christ should suffer and rise from the dead." To convince the world of the latter fact was the apostles' great task. The resurrection is the keystone of the Christian religion. But what a stupendous tax on men's minds, to lay it upon them to believe that one who died was now alive again, and alive for evermore! Man was



never challenged to accept a greater truth. The apostles staggered under it. Thomas absolutely refused to believe. Yet to establish this fact in the world there must be indisputable testimony. The witnesses must be so qualified that they could go forth with "many infallible proofs," so that they could say, "We did eat and drink with him after he rose from the dead."

Again, it was necessary to establish not only the fact that Jesus was alive after his passion, but also his activity in the affairs of men. The first two appearances recorded in John do little more than prove that he is; but in this one there is the additional idea that he co-operates with the disciples. It is made all the richer by recalling that former draught, so that they would lose some of their superstitious awe, and feel that their Master was again quite like himself; they had seen him thus before. For Jesus' death and resurrection do not take him from his friends, but give him to them.

They needed this revelation of him in work; for men are most of all sceptical on the point of the Lord's active participation in their efforts and needs. One says, "If thou wilt, thou canst make me clean;" another cries, "If thou canst do anything;" but the true heart alone says, Thou wilt, thou canst, thou dost,—so that the apostles afterward reported not what they had done, but what "God had done with them;" and Mark sums up their history with similar words, "the Lord working with them." Christian faith is more than to believe historic biblical facts. It believes God in Christ to be the one present, working agent in the world to-day. And these disciples, as they gathered these fishes this morning, must have been convinced that in all the work before them they would find Christ co-operating with them.

3. *Jesus eats with the disciples after their work.* This breakfast is every way beautiful. It seems to be Jesus' aim

in this whole morning's scene, its climax; for as soon as they were come to land, they saw a fire of coals glowing on the beach, and food in preparation. With this the disciples had had nothing to do. Still they have a share in providing the meal, for he says, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught." He graciously ascribes the capture to them. When all is ready he asks them to "come and dine." There was a strange backwardness on their part. They knew that he was the risen Lord, and yet none ventured to say it. While they hesitate, Jesus comes, takes bread and gives them, and fish likewise. Probably he ate with them; but it is certain that he was the serving host. With the keen appetites created by the night's hard toil, and with the loved Lord at the table, it was a breakfast to be enjoyed and evermore remembered.

This breakfast, like all the rest of the story, was a lesson and a prophecy. The training of the twelve before the resurrection differs greatly from that which succeeded it. This stupendous event wrought a change in the manner and conduct of the disciples when in the presence of the risen Lord. They had earlier been for the most part very familiar with him. They did not hesitate to advise him, to find fault with him, even to rebuke him. But now there is a spell upon them; they are awed, and have lost their freedom. Before him "none of them durst ask him, Who art thou?" This was unlike their former liberty; for Jesus himself was changed in appearance, or why should they have thought of asking, "Who art thou?"

In that earlier instruction the aim was to lead these men to say of that meek and lowly son of Mary, "Thou art the Christ, the Son of the living God." They said it and believed it; but how could they know its fathomless significance? They must go deeper into the lesson. They had not lost Christ. If they were too familiar before, they

were too much restrained now. The end of the incarnation, the cross, and the resurrection is to bring God and man into family relationship. It was one who sat at this breakfast this morning who afterward wrote, "And truly our fellowship is with the Father and with his Son, Jesus Christ." The truth involves two elements: man is more divine than he supposes, and God is more human than we suppose. If this startles, read again those words of the Almighty which occur so early in the sacred book, "Let us make man in our image." The Complete Man claimed to be the Son of God. Now the common meeting-place of the family is the table. There all appear on the same level, — the parent, the child, the friend. To eat together is an avowal of the highest relationship; and so Jesus eats with the disciples to win their trust anew, to show that he is still one with them, to picture his fellowship with them now and evermore.

The breakfast was also a prophecy of the time when the saint and the Saviour shall meet together to rejoice in the fellowship of a completed work. Paul wrote to those whom he had won to the Lord, "What is our hope or joy or crown of rejoicing? Are not even ye in the presence of our Lord Jesus Christ?" These converts must be to the apostle's honor at the last. The fellowship and joy of this breakfast were based not alone on what the Lord had done, but also on what they had done; for he said, "Bring of the fish which ye have now caught."















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